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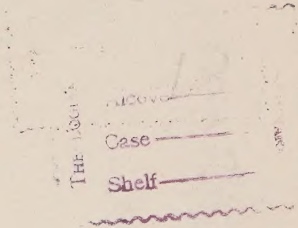
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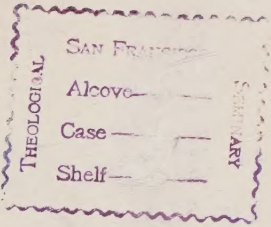

George Sterling

'But if there be in glory aught of good,
It may by means far different be attain'd,
Without ambition, war, or violence;
By deeds of peace, by wisdom eminent,
By patience, temperance.'

Paradise Regained, b. iii. 88–93.

CHARLES WELLS

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

Lum. - 230

BY

CHARLES WELLS

HENRY FROWDE
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON, NEW YORK AND TORONTO.

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JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

A DRAMATIC POEM

BY

CHARLES WELLS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

AND A NOTE ON ROSSETTI AND CHARLES WELLS BY

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON

HENRY FROWDE

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON, NEW YORK, TORONTO AND MELBOURNE

Charles Jeremiah Wells

Born 1800
Died, Marseilles . . . February 17, 1879

'*Joseph and his Brethren: a Dramatic Poem*' *was first published under the pseudonym of H. L. Howard in* 1824. *An edition with an introduction by Mr. Swinburne appeared in* 1876, *and was reprinted in* '*The World's Classics*' *in* 1908.

INTRODUCTION

It is said that all books find their level sooner or later; and indeed one would not willingly believe that anything of the highest worth can in the end be rejected by the judgment of men. Yet some great works there undoubtedly are which never seem likely to win their due place in general repute. How it is that they miss of fame it were hard to say; but some cross chance has nevertheless thrown them out of the straight way to it which we should have thought natural for them to take, and triumph; and time, that sets to right so much, forgets to settle their account with the celebrities and publicities of their day. Some books, like some men, seem to have come into the world with the brand of mischance on them for birthmark. Otherwise it would hardly be needful to refer any reader, at the distance of more than half a century, to an early sonnet of Keats for introduction to the name of Mr. Wells. This sonnet, written before the author's friend had himself come forward as a poet, remains almost the only indication extant, besides the all but forgotten existence of his own writings, that such a man was alive in that second golden age of English poetry which was comprised within the first quarter of the nineteenth century; unless the two or three yet fainter references to be

found in the published correspondence of Keats be admitted as further evidence. But about a year after the death of that poet a puny volume, hardly heavier than a pamphlet, labelled *Stories after Nature*, was cast upon the waters of the world, which received it with unanimous neglect, and has not yet found it after these many days; to be followed in two years' time by a 'Scriptural Drama', bearing the more decorous than attractive title of *Joseph and his Brethren*, and issued under the pseudonym of H. L. Howard; with a preface dated from London, a motto taken from Milton, and two hundred and fifty-two pages of clear print. The book has long since sunk so far out of general sight that the evidence of such details is necessary to convince us that poem and poet are not as unsubstantial as the personality of the sponsor Howard, as undiscoverable as the reason which may have induced the author to prefer the anonymous form of venture for his first book, the pseudonymous for his second. Assuredly there was in his case no reason for fear or shame in the publication of work not unworthy of the time when England still held, or still divided with the land of Goethe, that place at the head of European literature which France was to assume and retain after the mighty movement of 1830. Yet, though there was proof enough in the latter of these two little books that a new poet was in the world, and one only lesser than the greatest of his time in some of the greatest qualities of his art, the critics of the minute could not spare even such notice to his work as they had accorded to that of Keats; not an owl thought it worth while to stretch his throat, not an ass to

lift up his heel against the workman. So the books vanished at once; and now only by such happy chance as sometimes may come to the help of assiduous research can they be dug up from the cemeteries of literature. At rare casual intervals some thin and reedy note of eulogy has been uttered over the grave of a noble poem, bewitched as it were to a sleep like death; and has always hitherto failed of a hearing. Nor did even the choice and eloquent words of praise bestowed on it by Mr. Rossetti, in a supplementary chapter to Gilchrist's *Life of Blake*, succeed in attracting the notice which Blake himself had not yet won from our generation. Notwithstanding, the truth remains, that the author of *Joseph and his Brethren* will some day have to be acknowledged among the memorable men of the second great period in our poetry.

The first publication of Mr. Wells, written, it is said, in his earliest youth, has much of the charm and something of the weakness natural to the first flight and the first note of a song-bird whose wings have yet to grow and whose notes have yet to deepen; yet in its first flutterings and twitterings there is a nameless grace, a beauty indefinable, which belongs only to the infancy of genius as it belongs only to the infancy of life. To a reader of the age at which this book was written it will seem—or so at least it seemed to me—'perfect in grace and power, tender and exquisite in choice of language, full of a noble and masculine delicacy in feeling and purpose'; and he will be ready to attribute the utter neglect which has befallen it simply 'to the imbecile caprice of hazard and opinion'. Even then, however, he will per-

ceive, if there be in him any critical judgment or any promise of such faculty to come, that the style of these stories is too near poetry to be really praiseworthy as prose; that they relish of a bastard graft; that they halt between two kinds of merit. At times they will seem to him almost to attain the standard of the Decameron; yet even he will remark that they want the direct aim and clear comprehension of story which are never wanting in Boccaccio. That perfect narrative power which sustains the most poetical stories even of the fifth day of the Decameron, keeping always in full view the simple prose of the event, is too often lacking here. And the youngest reader will probably take note that 'there is a savour of impossibility (so to speak), a sort of incongruous beauty dividing the subject and the style, which removes the *Stories after Nature* from our complete apprehension, and baffles the reader's delight in them'; that 'even the licence of a fairy tale is here abruptly leapt over; names and places are thrust in which perplex the very readiest belief even of that factitious kind which we may accord to things practically impossible: English kings and Tuscan dukes occupy the place reserved in the charity of our imaginations for kings of Lyonesse and princesses of Garba; the language also is often cast in the mould of Elizabethan convention; absolute Euphuism, with all its fantastic corruptions of style, breaks out and runs rampant here and there; especially in a few of the more passionate speeches this starched ugliness of ruff and rebato will be felt to stiffen and deform the style of the same page which contains some of the sweetest and purest English

ever written'. On taking up the little book again in after years he will also discern the perceptible influence of Leigh Hunt in some of the stories; and that sweet and graceful essayist, much of whose critical work, and not a little of his poetical, retains its charm to this day, a soft light fragrance less evanescent than it seems, had set no good example in his short sentimental narratives for any pupil to follow. One or two at least of the younger poet's stories, had we found them in the *Indicator* or some other of Hunt's magazines, we should, I think, have set down as somewhat thin and empty samples of the editor's hastier work; in others there is a fresh and exquisite beauty which is due to no inspiration but his own.

But, in whatever degree the undeniable presence of minor faults and mere stains of carelessness may excuse the neglect of Mr. Wells's prose stories, no such plea of passing defect can extenuate the scandal of the fact that to this day his great dramatic poem remains known perhaps on the whole to about half a dozen students of English art.

The first part, ending with the sale of Joseph to the Midianites, is written throughout with a wonderful ease and stateliness of manner which recall the more equable cadences of Shakespeare in his earliest period, before he had as yet thoroughly absorbed the beneficent influence of Marlowe's more grave and ambitious example. There is a certain sweet tenuity in the continuous melody of the verse, an evident disposition to rest too easily contented with the first forms that offer themselves to clothe the first fancies, an ignorance when to stop and where to breathe, a facile in-

dulgence in superfluity of speech, from which the greatest of poets could not disengage his genius without the discipline of time and work. But then, here is also an inborn instinct of style, a simple sense of right, which will not allow the stream of speech to grow harsh or turbid for an instant. Here is a solution of the problem which baffled the aspiration and the endeavour of one of our greatest poets. 'There 's such a divinity doth hedge our Shakespeare round', said Coleridge, 'that we cannot even imitate his style.' He had tried to reproduce it—we must take his word for the fact without hope of further evidence—in the style of his *Remorse*, and found in the end—another assertion which taxes our faith as rudely as it violates our reason—that he had throughout been treading in the steps of Fletcher and Massinger. Be that as it may, the hedge which defied the vaulting ambition of that sovereign master of lyric verse has been fairly cleared by the younger rider whose early feat in the race of song found so few spectators to applaud it. There are lines even in the overture of his poem which might, it seems to me, more naturally be mistaken even by an expert in verse for the work of the young Shakespeare, than any to be gathered elsewhere in the fields of English poetry. Take these, of the setting sun:

> A god gigantic, habited in gold,
> Stepping from off a mount into the sea.—(P. 6.)

Two such lines, and there are many such, would suffice, with a certain school of commentators, to establish the unquestionable partnership of Shakespeare in the Elizabethan play which should con-

tain them. The pure dramatic quality is perhaps best shown in the characters of Reuben and Issachar, where the poet has found least material for his workmanship in the original story. Especially the rough spite of the latter, as deep and bitter as a cooler or more patient hatred could be, is so well given that his part stands out distinct in our memories till the end; the 'strong ass', hard and blunt, readiest to strike and slowest to suffer. Jacob again is a clear and vigorous sketch; all excess of weakness has been avoided, and the baser aspect of age and fondness kept out of our thoughts. There is a genuine force of dramatic effect in his sudden appearance and upbraiding of the brothers (p. 12). And this passage of Joseph's speech (p. 13) has in it a grand Elizabethan echo :—

> Would they be envious, let them then be great,
> Envy old cities, ancient neighbourhoods,
> Great men of trust and iron-crownèd kings;
> For household envy is a household rat;
> Envy of state a devil of some fear.
> E'en in my sleep my mind doth eat strange food,
> Enough to strengthen me against this hate.

The next scene, though less effective at first sight, is well placed as an interlude of rest before the harsher action of the drama. The scenes in which Joseph is taken and sold, and the forged news of his death broken to his father, may be commended for a high dramatic insight and delicate justice of arrangement which can only be understood by a straightforward reading.

There is something in the description of Rachel (p. 32) which recalls the luxury and exuberance, if not the vigour and concentration, of Marlowe's

sweet and fiery raptures. As fine, but in another fashion, is the speech of Reuben which follows it; full of thought and pliant power compressed into brief grand words. But indeed verses as good as these might be gathered from all parts of the first act, especially in the scene where Joseph is taken from the pit and offered to the merchants—

> Swarthy Egyptians, yellow as their gold,
> Riding on mules;

a scene which abounds in passages fit for citation; for example, the description of the costly wares and trading life of the Ishmaelites; and later in the play we may note the imprecations of Reuben on his brethren (too much prolonged it may be, but rich in splendid verses and weighty turns of thought); the gradual breaking of the evil tidings to Jacob; and the lofty prelude-music of the chorus before the second act. But the crowning triumph of the poem is to be found there where the kernel of the whole story lies.

Only once before had such a character as that of the heroine been given with supreme success, and only by him who has given all things rightly, in whom there was no shadow of imperfection or failure. In the Cleopatra of Shakespeare and in the Phraxanor of the present play there is the same imperious conscience of power by right of supreme beauty and supreme strength of will; the same subtle sweetness of speech; the same delicately rendered effect of perfection in word and gesture, never violated or made harsh even by extreme passion; the same evidence of luxurious and patient pleasure found in all things sensually pleasant; the same capacity of bitter shame and

wrath, dormant until the insult of resistance or rebellion has been offered; the same contemptuous incapacity to understand a narrower passion or a more external morality than their own; the same rapid and supple power of practical action. All women in literature after these two seem coarse or trivial when they touch on anything sensual; but in *their* passion there is nothing common or unclean; nothing paltry, no taint of vulgar sin or more vulgar repentance, can touch these two. And this the later poet, at least, has made out of the slightest and thinnest material possible; his original being not only insufficient—the very bare bones of conjecture, the suggestion of a skeleton character—but actually, as far as it was anything at all, so associated with ideas simply ludicrous and base that the very name of 'Potiphar's wife' has the sound of a coarse by-word.

To prove by special reference the truth of what has just been said would be the most inadequate kind of evidence that could be offered; but it must surely be evident to any reader that the manner of Phraxanor's entrance (p. 97) is a noble and most dramatic introduction, worthy of Shakespeare's own art and judgment. Nor is there any note of weariness or decline in what follows; but the passion of these scenes is managed with such a noble temperance and so just an art, that a first reading will perhaps hardly suffice to show the author's lofty mastery of his own genius. Such wealth and such wisdom in the use of it, such luxury and such forbearance of style, are in the highest Elizabethan manner.

In the next scene Phraxanor reasons of love with an attendant, whose character, the very

dimmest sketch possible, is designed seemingly as a relief to her own. There is a flavour of sentimental chastity in the few speeches allotted her which makes them feeble and flimsy enough; but this weak emptiness of the girl serves somehow to set off and exalt the splendid sensuous vigour of Phraxanor's share in the dialogue. This passage at least (p. 104) has the absolute ring of Shakespeare; 'pure fire indeed'.

ATTENDANT. Then, madam, you would say
That there is nothing in the world but love.
PHRAXANOR. Not quite; but I would say the fiery sun
Doth not o'ershine the galaxy so far;
Nor doth a torch within a jewell'd mine
Amaze the eye beyond this diamond here
More than the ruddy offices of love
Do glow before the common steps of life.

There are in the same scene two magnificent passages of prolonged and subtle rhetoric, finer perhaps as pieces of conscious and imperious sophistry than anything in the way of poetical reasoning that has since been done. The first, a panegyric on the potency of love and masterdom of woman (p. 105). The second (pp. 108–110) is deeper in thought and more intricate in writing than any other speech in the play. It is a subtle plea in defence of inconstancy in women; this inconstancy, as governed and directed by art and practical skill, being (in the speaker's mind) the substitute for that laborious singleness of heart and devotion of the will to bare truth which make a man the stronger by nature of the two, but which a woman cannot (it is argued) attain or retain without violating her nature and abdicating her power upon man. The queenly sophist then turns

back the discourse to questions of love, handling (as it were) her own heart delicately, and weighing beforehand the power of her senses to bear pleasure; and at length, after all this noble repose of preparation, Joseph enters with a message from his master. This scene is throughout managed with such supreme dexterity that one overlooks the almost ludicrous or repellent side of it, for which Mr. Wells is not responsible. The temptress here is not repulsive, and the hero is hardly ridiculous. These are touches of weighty thought and keen perception not less noticeable than the continuous effusion of verbal luxury; the quiet heavy malice of this is as worthy of Shakespeare as the elaborate and faultless music of the passage on love which precedes it (p. 121).

> PHRAXANOR. I have a mind
> You shall at once walk with those honest limbs
> Into your grave.

It would be superfluous to remark on the marvellous grace and strength of what follows—the subtle rapid changes of passion, the life and heat of blood in every verse, the sublime intense power of contempt which seems to make the written words bite and burn, the swift dramatic unison of so many sudden and sharp fancies of wrath with the aptest and most facile expression. Perhaps, however, the chief success is still behind; for after the return of Potiphar it must have been a labour of especial difficulty to keep up the scene at the same pitch. Nevertheless, the writer's power never flags or falls off for an instant, from the moment when Phraxanor turns from Joseph towards her returning husband:—

My injuries rejoice;
I turn my back on thee as on the dead.
—Ah! give me breath.—(P. 135.)

The picture of Joseph's fidelity (p. 138) is as fine as her invective; but the sudden turn at the end is worth many pages of luxurious eloquence.

PHRAXANOR. Will *you* praise him, my honour'd lord?
POTIPHAR. Why so?
PHRAXANOR. Because he never must be prais'd again.

This is another of those instances of reserve which abound in Shakespeare only. Touches like these occur in Webster, but hardly in any third dramatist. Cyril Tourneur perhaps has hit here and there upon something of the same effect. The hesitation of Potiphar to believe a charge so incongruous as that laid upon Joseph is admirably given; not less admirable is the explanation of Phraxanor (pp. 140, 141). Joseph's vindication of his father's honour from the taunts of both wife and husband is another noble and quotable passage; and the fierce brief inquisition of Phraxanor which follows it is as dramatic as anything in the great preceding scene.

From the departure of Phraxanor (p. 150) to the end of the play, the interest of it is rather in the poet's power of workmanship than in the subject-matter; as indeed could not but be, taking into account the reaction which must follow on such scenes as those in the house of Potiphar. Yet it should be noted that the famine in Canaan, the triumphal procession of 'the swart Pharaoh full of majesty', and finally the advent of Jacob, are all done into word with admirable and equal vigour; and further sway lines and sentences of

exquisite worth might be picked out and strung together till half the book were transcribed.

But this is no part of our task. Now that the poem is here at last unearthed and restored to the sight of men, those who will may judge how far the qualities displayed in its highest parts, the capacities implied throughout, fall short of those requisite for a poet who would win in the hardest of all its fields the highest palms reserved for the masters of his art. I should be loath to think that mere accident or mere fashion had such power for evil in the world of imaginative work as in the world of actual experience; but, considering of what precious things that did once exist the stroke of sudden chance or the influence of gradual change has undoubtedly deprived us, we may reasonably fear that the powers which have robbed humanity of so much that it once possessed, may have robbed it also of possibilities not less precious than these foregone possessions. It is probable that the author, it is certain that the reader, of this poem cannot say what fruit the genius which inspired it might have borne, had that genius ever found space to work in and students to work for. It remains only for those who are capable of serious regard for his art to pay, as I do here, the tardy thanks of a later generation to the veteran who, after winning his spurs so early in so high a field, retired, without further struggle or pretext, to await for more than half a century, with 'the wise indifference of the wise', the ultimate award which should concede or reject his claim to a crown worth many that have flourished and faded between the morning and the evening of his life.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

ROSSETTI AND CHARLES WELLS

A REMINISCENCE OF KELMSCOTT MANOR

I

THE influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti upon the art and poetry of his time is beyond all gauging. If it had not been for him, Mr. Swinburne would never have written his brilliant essay upon Blake, and if it had not been for that essay Blake would perhaps not have become the idol of a whole group of poets and writers, until the reader begins to sigh wearily when he hears the name of Blake. If Rossetti had never picked up in Quaritch's penny lumber-box a copy of Fitz-Gerald's paraphrase of Omar Khayyam, people would never have heard of the *Rubáiyat*, and we should have been spared an ocean of writing upon the tent-maker of Nísháp̀ur. Those sceptical quatrains would not have become sacred in the eyes of Christians and free-thinkers alike. The age is obsessed by Blake and Omar (the very opposites of each other, surely), and all because Rossetti discovered them.

But what about Rossetti's other find? What about Charles Wells and *Joseph and his Brethren*? 'There was a time when *Joseph and his Brethren*', says Mr. Gosse, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 'became a kind of Shibboleth—a rite of initiation into the true poetic culture.' No young poet at one time dare show his face at 16 Cheyne Walk,

or at Madox Brown's great studio in Fitzroy Square, or at Westland Marston's midnight gatherings by Chalk Farm, or at Lady Duffus Hardy's At Homes, who could not utter the Shibboleth. The so-called Pre-Raphaelite poets, Arthur O'Shaughnessy, John Payne, Philip Marston, Theo. Marzials, and Edmund Gosse himself, *had* to read *Joseph and his Brethren* in order to exist. Carefully and anxiously was the copy at the British Museum thumbed by many an aspirant to poetic fame. Now the fact is undeniable that *Joseph and his Brethren* is a Shibboleth no longer. The present generation know nothing of it. Fashions in poetry are as fugitive as fashions in dress. And the question has presented itself to the critics of to-day, 'Did the insight of Rossetti fail him with regard to this poem?'

It chanced that when the poem was reprinted in 1876, I had much to do—more to do than any one, except my friend Mr. Buxton Forman—with that publication. And the publisher of the 'World's Classics' thinks that an account of the venture by me will be found generally interesting. I am afraid it will have to be long, for there is a good deal to tell.

I had not known Rossetti long before he began to talk to me about the poem. It was during my first stay at Kelmscott Manor, whither I had been invited with Dr. Gordon Hake. And the subject brings back that most delightful retreat of the two poets—Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris. They had taken the Manor House together and occupied it alternately. I was a privileged visitor of both occupants and if

I were to record the interesting conversations that I had there with the poet of *The Blessed Damozel* and the poet of *The Earthly Paradise*, I should fill a library.

Rossetti and I went strolling one day beside the banks of the Upper Thames, when he said, 'You are a Shakespearean student, *n'est-ce pas* ?' (Dr. Hueffer had been showing him an essay upon the lost *Hamlet* by me.)

'You may call me so, if you like,' I said; 'I know enough of Shakespeare and his contemporaries to be amazed at his infinite superiority to all the others.'

'Are you aware that we have discovered', said Rossetti, 'an unknown poem more Shakespearean than anything else out of Shakespeare ? —You smile.'

'Men of genius', I said, 'should sometimes be mistrusted in their poetical finds. There are not many lumps of quartz which the auriferous light shed from the poet's own eye cannot transmute into very respectable nuggets.'

'You are sarcastic,' he said.

'The fact is,' I said, 'I have got a good deal wearied with the iteration and reiteration of this word "Shakespearean". Through all this century, or at least since Coleridge wrote about Shakespeare, critics have been writing and talking of him as though they had

> Eaten on the insane root
> That takes the reason prisoner.'

'You must', said he, 'have been in touch with Dion Boucicault and the cockney Shakespeares who have lately, I believe, been comparing their

own dramatic efforts with the much poorer stuff of the Bard of Avon. Every generation produces its playwright who at the finish of every play exclaims, "Where is your Wullie Shakespeare noo?"'

'No. I know nothing of the cockney Shakespeares. You would not call Westland Marston one of them, for only the other day he said to me, "The more contemptible the playwright . . . the more sure is he to talk of 'Shakespeare and me'." All I mean is that Shakespearean critics will insist upon formulating new canons of criticism expressly for one author.'

'There is something in that, I must say,' he replied.

'They treat the characters of all other imaginative writers as being imaginary: Shakespeare's characters they treat as being real. This is not fair either to the dramatist Nature or to the human dramatist. The difference between the characters drawn by Nature and the characters drawn by Art is, of course, fundamental. Nature's handiwork is always at bottom casuistic, you know. No law does she recognize, except that of her own sweet will.'

The subject was resumed when we returned to the tapestried room in the old house which formed Rossetti's studio. A most picturesque room it was, as some few who read these pages will remember. The walls were covered with faded tapestry representing the story of Samson. This studio was full of Rossetti's pictures which he had sent for from Leyland and Graham to retouch, and sometimes not for the better. I was rather

sceptical about Rossetti's having found a poem which treated with anything like adequacy the incomparable Bible story which, from my earliest childhood, had sunk more deeply into my own soul than any other. For picturesqueness, for nobility, for every kind of beauty, that story seems to me the loveliest in the world. The human passions set a-working are the greatest that have ever stirred, for good or for ill, the soul of man: magnanimity, generosity, love of kindred, hatred of kindred, envy of kindred, jealousy of kindred, filial reverence, an aged father's passionate affection for his beloved wife Rachel's son, the beauty of forgiveness—what is there not delineated in this matchless story, save the one passion which is the most powerful of all, sexual love?

'What a subject for a drama!' I said, 'but, surely it is incapable of being treated artistically by any dramatist or any poet. The very name of Wells's play, *Joseph and his Brethren*, was quite enough to kill it.'

'Why?' said Rossetti.

'Because the only female interest it suggests is that of Potiphar's wife, a very unsavoury female. What surprises me is that Wells managed to get a publisher for a play on such a subject. I have always understood that the first thing a publisher asks an author about his manuscript is not, "What is in it?" but, "What are you going to call it?"'

'That is true,' said he, with one of his loud guffaws. 'In literature as in life, "What are you going to call a thing?" is the first question; that is especially so when the publisher is bargaining on the slopes of Parnassus. But as to the unsavouri-

ness of Potiphar's wife ; in every drama, you know, there must be a villain or a villainess to do battle with the hero or good person, and, as Wells has not tampered with the Scripture narrative, but has given us a portrait of a lecherous woman, perfectly unique—perfectly astounding for vigour —you will find that she makes a pretty successful villainess.'

'Ah, but this is not all the difficulty of such a subject,' I said. 'In any dramatization of the Scripture story of Joseph the "frisky matron" has to take the parts of villainess and heroine both—don't forget that. Without her there is no female interest at all. And remember that in a poem or a novel, although a lecherous female can be tolerated if she is only sketched or outlined, let the same lady be painted thoroughly in and she becomes intolerable. In the Biblical narrative Potiphar's wife is a mere impersonation of lust ; she doesn't even bear a name, nor does she bear a name in the Koran : the "Rahil" of some of the Arabian commentators is a name entirely invented by themselves.'

'Then you think that the old Hebrew teller of that story felt that she would not bear elaboration?'

'Yes, that's what I think ; and, of course, in any artistically worked story, female interest is indispensable, unless the story is so slight as to be a mere anecdote.'

'Then it follows, I suppose, that in order to treat poetically a story whose heroine is such a woman as Potiphar's wife, it is necessary to idealize her. You will find, when you come to read the poem, that Wells certainly has not done that.'

'My contention', said I, 'is that even as a nucleus of a character to be dramatically developed, improved, and whitewashed, she is quite ineligible. A heroine's breath may be as poisonous as that of your favourite damsel, Rappaccini's daughter, and yet she may be romantically treated; but in the flower-garden of poesy the breath of Potiphar's wife would be no better than the perfume of a bad cabbage.'

'But', said Rossetti, laughing, 'it is wonderful how a bad cabbage can be improved by washing and fumigating. Nero, the fiddler, you know, has been washed and fumigated by the new breed of historians to a sort of Roman Israfeel, one of the first musicians in heaven. Henry the Eighth has been washed and fumigated to the most uxorious of husbands and the best, only a leetle too much married.'

'No doubt,' I said, 'but although a lecherous man may be whitewashed and fumigated, it is not so with a lecherous woman. To do anything with Potiphar's wife, Wells must have washed and improved her off the face of the earth altogether, and replaced her by another woman.'

'Well, as I say, Wells has done nothing of that sort. He has certainly left the bad cabbage unwashed and unfumigated. But you must go to the British Museum and read it for yourself. You cannot see it elsewhere.'

Talking while he painted, as was his wont when his mind was not too much absorbed in his work to admit of conversation, he soon left the subject of Wells and his poem, and touched upon a matter which was at that moment nearer to us

both; and *Joseph and his Brethren* was wiped out of my mind.

II

After I left Kelmscott, I very soon went to the British Museum and read the poem. The imaginative power and penetrative intellect displayed on every page were quite astonishing, I thought. The poet, with entire fidelity, had followed the Biblical story and had undoubtedly caught, with amazing skill, Shakespeare's way of writing blank verse in one of his earlier stages. Nor less remarkable was his manner of catching Shakespeare's most happy knack of blending metaphor and music so perfectly that each seems born of the other. This, however, did not so greatly surprise me, for I had before observed that Shakespeare's metaphorical style—though for the most part as inimitable by poets of a high rank as a nightingale's note is inimitable by a skylark, or a skylark's note by a nightingale—can nevertheless be sometimes caught by poets whose rank is not high. Alexander Smith's case is a notable one in point. With a very brilliant fancy, but with less dramatic power, perhaps, than any considerable poet of his day, Smith could spin off blank verse sentences like this :—

> My drooping sails
> Flap idly 'gainst the mast of my intent,
> I rot upon the waters, when my prow
> Should grate the golden isles.

To have been able to turn out a sentence so very like one of Shakespeare's own as that, a great poet like Coleridge would almost have given one of his ears; yet how unimaginative is Smith

when compared not only with the writer of *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*, but with the poet of *Joseph and his Brethren*. It is true, no doubt, that a great poet like Tennyson will sometimes be able to do it, as in

> Authority forgets a dying king.

But this is on rare occasions. Browning could also do it, as in the famous allusion to the pearl-diver in *Paracelsus*, but this also is only once in a way. Neither of these really great writers could get so near to Shakespeare as Alexander Smith, or Wells—a curious fact to be noted in the criticism of English poetry.

In true dramatic power, too, Wells deserved a great deal if not all the high praise given to his work by Rossetti,—so, at least, it seemed to me. Although Wells allows himself, among other licences, that of putting into the mouths of certain characters whatsoever he wills—Wordsworthean reflections, descriptions, and what not—it must be remembered that he did not set out to write a play, but merely to give his own imaginings of the story of Joseph in a loose kind of dramatic poem. Moreover, it is only into the mouths of the minor characters that he puts undramatic speeches. When he comes to the great actors in his drama he shows what in my article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* on Poetry I have said is the characteristic of the dramatist of the second class, the power of putting himself in another's place. But in one passage in the poem, he goes far beyond this : he hits the mark as inevitably as logic. This is in that speech of Potiphar's wife after Joseph has rushed out of the door to escape her lecherous wiles, which Mr. Swin-

burne's criticism has made famous. The Bible does not tell us what the temptress said as she sank back in her rage; but we feel that what she *did* say is exactly what Wells puts into her mouth.

> PHRAXANOR. I have a mind
> You shall at once walk with those honest limbs
> Into your grave.

She could not possibly have said anything else. But Wells does not reach this 'absolute vision' more than once. Another thing to be observed in the poem was the influence of Keats, seen in such boyish whimsies as that of attenuating and weakening a line by scanning the termination 'tion' as a disyllable in order to be like the old poets, and also in a Keatsean exuberance of colour and gorgeousness of description.

III

It must be remembered that *Joseph and his Brethren* does not pretend to be a play. It is the precursor of those 'dramatic poems' such as *Festus*, *Balder*, *The Roman*, *A Life Drama*, &c., which were once the fashion, and will again become so. Drama having entirely lost its flexibility, the dramatic poem must and will take its place in literature, unless the *cant fable*—a mixture of prose and verse—is adopted. Altogether the book fascinated me, not merely on account of the dramatic and poetic qualities that Rossetti had extolled, but on account of other qualities of an extremely different kind—qualities which would scarcely have appealed to Rossetti.

This is what I mean: the great peculiarity–

perhaps I may say the great weakness of modern poetry is a certain insensitiveness to atmosphere. This shows itself the moment that the poet tries to make the reader breathe the open air, whether on land or sea. It cannot be done by means of realistic details. Some one said of David Cox that he ' could make you *see* the air '. I suppose that what the paradox meant was that this delightful painter could (either consciously or unconsciously) make you *feel* the air. It is almost as though the painter had endowed you for the moment with a sixth sense. In poetry, Coleridge alone, in *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*, can achieve this. I wish I could explain what I mean, but explanations of sensations are difficult, almost impossible. I wonder whether there is anything very whimsical in what I am going to suggest. If there is, the frank and genial reader will condone it.

Naturalists tell us that the evolution of the organic and conscious world is recorded by the increasing and ever increasing demarcation of the senses, as species ascend up to man. In other words, instead of the organism reflecting the undulations of the universe, in a mingling of light, colour, perfume, and sound, each of the five senses of man, as in lower forms, works in an independent and egotistical manner. None of the high-grade animals has lost so entirely as man has the primitive faculty of reflecting the outer world in one mingled sensation. The lower animals often exhibit what is called a ' sixth sense '—exhibit it in what to us seems a magical way. In man, perhaps, something of this primitive power of receiving impressions from all the senses at once is seen at times in the

uncivilized races. In the poetry of the New Zealanders, for instance, and in that of the North American Indians the singer seems to envelop the hearer in the atmosphere of the picture without the aid of visual details. Whether or not excessive civilization demarcates the five senses so sharply as to enfeeble and wither the power of receiving blended external impressions through all the senses at once, this seems to be certain, that a sense of the open air cannot be rendered by the cumulative details that poets give us. Whenever it *is* achieved it seems to be done by an indefinable power possessed by the rarest singers in the civilized world of reproducing the dreamy feeling that all the senses have become blended into one by the magnetic touch of Nature's own breath and hand.

In some degree Wells seems to me to show this rare faculty. This is especially seen in the two prologues: the scenery, the sweet pastoral life of the patriarch and his family in Canaan, and the picture of old Egypt as she will always live in our day-dreams, the Egypt of the Pharaohs; Memphis and the banks of the sacred Nile, are brought before us not by description but by suggestion, and the atmosphere seems to surround us and be one with us. In a word, I discovered in the poem, as I thought, the note of that peculiar temperament which I described in the *Athenaeum*, a quarter of a century ago, in an article on 'The Children of the Open Air'; and I have enlarged upon the subject on several occasions since, when writing of George Borrow and of Thoreau, the latter in 'the World's Classics'.

It must not be supposed that Wells did this consciously. Cockney born was he, and never

dreamt of playing the Man of the Woods, like Thoreau, or the 'noble savage', naked but not ashamed, like Walt Whitman; but on every page his poem shows that if ever there was a man of this temperament it was the writer of *Joseph and his Brethren*. I discovered also that he was of the true breed of the vagabond-poets—a race in whom I have always taken a special interest. Need the vagabond-poet be defined? He is a man who, as I have on a previous occasion said, though he may think it fine (as it undoubtedly is) to write poems, never, even at the moment when he dips his pen into the inkpot, forgets that there is something finer still—that is, to drink deeply and manfully, while he may, of Nature's wine-fountain of poetry and life. Though he delights to embody in beautiful shapes the lovely dreams which sometimes vex and sometimes bless his soul, the impulse within him of the fine egotism of art is not strong enough to impel him to do so, except under the most inviting conditions. He is the opposite of those poets of the over-busy pen who must keep on working while life's pageantry goes slipping unheeded by—those who *must* keep producing their pearls—who cannot help producing them, even though they know too well that all that Philistia is pining for is not poetry at all, but just its usual feed of swill and grains. In other words, to the vagabond-poet the impulse to produce, though strong, is not nearly so overmastering as is the call of Nature's voice. Unless greatly encouraged thereto he says to his brother writer, 'Why should you or I give our fleeting lives away to any and all who can hire or buy a book?'

Except on rare occasions, therefore, he shrinks from the painful joy of embodying in concrete form what, after all, never *can* be satisfactorily embodied in any artistic medium—not by the cunningest pen or pencil—the picture of beauty which Nature paints for those who know her and love her, and are known and loved by her.

If I had room I should like to give a few out of many instances showing this temperament which the book affords. Mr. Rickett, the author of a delightful book called *The Vagabond in Literature*, says that I have always had a weakness for the vagabond-poet. And I will not deny it. I could easily show that Wells's note is almost always the note of health—the note of a sweet acceptance and melodious utterance of the beauty of the world as it is. As old as poetry itself is this most precious note—the note of health. Does it not inform and inspire every line of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*? Whether those priceless poems were given to bless mankind by one bard, or a dozen, it is this same note of health that makes the Homeric poems a joy for ever:—in our youth a joy; in our manhood a joy, an ever-growing joy; but never so great a joy as afterwards, when the autumn of life sets in, when the years come on more and more quickly, and the mind begins to realize more and more fully the beauty of the beautiful world, the romance and the wonderfulness of man's story, and all the 'sweetness of the waters of life'—when the reading and re-reading of these beloved pictures of the high temper of man in the heroic youth of the world—man confronting and daring the 'arrows of Fate and Chance'—sheds sunshine

into the heart and sets the blood a-tingling as no other poetry can do—as nothing else in the world can do, unless it be a ride across familiar heaths and fields on a summer morning when the dews are shaking from the leaves, and the sunshine seems new, and yet, in some delightful way, the very same sunshine of long ago. In our own land, the earliest and best specimen of this note is, of course, to be found in that famous thirteenth-century lyric which can never appear in print too often. Though he who wrote it—or rather who sang this song—may not have been a poet-vagabond, the soul of a veritable child of the open air was in him.

Sumer is i-cumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu;
Groweth sede and bloweth mede
And springeth the wude nu
Sing cuccu, cuccu.

Chaucer, too, though circumstances prevented him from being a poet-vagabond, gave voice to the same note of health. Among the artistic poets of England, indeed, he stands foremost as the poet of health. Not of those poets is he who are so dazzled by gazing above the earth and beyond it that the flowers and grass and trees, and even the men and women, seem common and superfluous. No, he is of those other singers, those simply and honestly terrene bards organized to see with a loving clarity and a rare ecstasy the riches of the world at hand. And of these terrene poets Chaucer reigns the king.

This note of health—as I perceived before I had read half a dozen pages of *Joseph and his Brethren*—was the note of Charles Wells. Therefore I

expected to find, and did find when I afterwards got the story of his life from Rossetti, that if ever there was a vagabond-poet it is he. As delightfully fresh, confiding, and loving, as though he had been the brother of the prince of lyrists who gave us

Sumer is i-cumen in,

was the outlook of this London-imprisoned man upon life and nature. For him it was enough to know that the 'blue sky bends over all'. The keynote of the poem is in Joseph's answer to the threats of Potiphar's wife :

God is in Heaven, madam ! with your leave.

In truth, among the nineteenth-century writers, he seems to be healthier than Walter Scott himself, if that be possible.

IV

After I had finished reading the poem, and while I sat meditating upon it in a mood of real enjoyment, it chanced that a man of extraordinary parts, very famous then, but now entirely forgotten, passed me as I was leaving the Reading Room.

We went out and took a chop together in a snug little place which we both knew, near to the Museum.

'What were you doing when I came upon you in your Museum doze ?' he asked.

I told him, and as he seemed interested in what I said, I gave him a full account of Wells's poem and its subject, quoting here and there some of

the finest lines, for many of them clung to my memory, as they have done ever since. I told him of Rossetti's exalted opinion of the poem. I told him also what we had both said about the impossibility of idealizing Potiphar's wife.

'Then you are wrong,' said he. 'The Persian poets have already accomplished the feat, I assure you.'

'Do tell me about it,' I said.

'Well, they realized that the mere animal appetite of Potiphar's wife was unworkable in a poem, so they followed an Oriental tradition and made the woman's infatuation the result of fatality.'

'The fatality of lust?'

'No, the fatality of magnetic attraction. They show her as a beautiful, pure-minded girl, before her marriage to Potiphar, haunted by a vision of a man supernaturally introduced to her in her sleep, a dream-youth of ideal beauty, of whom Joseph—to be afterwards encountered by her—is the realization.'

'Then they have found a way of making a heroine do the business of the temptress in the play, who is not a mere disgusting foil to the perfect moral beauty of the hero, but who is sufficiently interesting to become the heroine?'

'Just so.'

'Your Persian poets, then, have found a beautiful poetic excuse for her sin—for sin she must, of course—an excuse such as a jury of seraphim might and *must* accept?'

'Just so.'

He told me the whole story of the Persian poets, following as far as they could the Koran. 'Step by

step they have moved,' said he, 'till at length, from the somewhat shadowy and uncertain heroine of Ferdusi's poem, we get, through subsequent poets, to the glorious parable poem of Jámí, in which the coarse Potiphar's wife of the Bible and of the Koran becomes the tender girl Zulaikha. Will that satisfy you?'

'Perfectly,' I said.

As we parted at the door of the restaurant, he said, 'What do you think of this version of Wells's subject?'

'It must be', I said, 'the finest love-story in the world mingled with another story which before lacked nothing but just such a mingling. I shall certainly tell Rossetti this. He is greatly in quest of a new subject just now. A Persian subject ought to interest him. I'll see if I can't persuade him to write another *Joseph and his Brethren*, on different lines from Wells. It will top all the poems of this century.'

'Do,' said he.

V

It was with my mind full of these two versions of *Joseph and his Brethren*, one with the idealized Potiphar's wife, and the other with the same lady unidealized, that I took the train late one lovely summer afternoon to Lechlade, and then strolled to the old seven-gabled house on the river.

Not wanting to get there until after Rossetti's late dinner was over, I dawdled along the hedgerows. By the time I reached Kelmscott the moon was shining. I stood among the trees, and looking up at the window of the room where Rossetti used to read and write, I saw a shadow on the window-

blind, the outline of which was unmistakable. Rossetti was as easily recognized by a glimpse of his back as by a glimpse of his face, owing to his broad square shoulders being surmounted by a somewhat long neck round which a fringe of little curls clustered. He was sitting at his table looking at a manuscript.

'He is evidently at work,' I said, 'losing a divine evening like this.'

Naturally this picture set my thoughts actively working upon the subject of the vagabond-poet who was associated in my mind with anything rather than work.

When I reached the 'Tapestry-room' in which he was writing, I persuaded him to leave it and to take a stroll with me in the meadows in the moonlight, which was rapidly growing brighter and brighter. I didn't say to him, 'Be for once an open-air poet yourself.' But I was thinking it.

I shall not soon forget that stroll. The talk was all about Wells's poem. I made some notes of it.

Thirty years and more have passed since I summarized this talk in articles upon Wells. What I now set down is the disjointed conversation itself during our stroll through the meadows. I think it brings out what I have often described as 'Rossetti's incisive conversation which always had the pleasurable surprise of wit'. Rossetti's wit was like that of no other man of my time. It may be described as fancy in rapid evolution. When he talked slowly you saw that it was fancy: when he talked rapidly, you recognized it as wit. The conversation mainly took place as we sat in

the moonlight by the weir so charmingly described by Dr. Hake in *The New Day*.

Down where the weir the bursting current stems—
  There sat till evening grew to balmy night,
Veiling the weir whose roar recalled the strand
  Where we had listened to the wave-lipped sea,
That seemed to utter plaudits while we planned
  Triumphal labours of the day to be.

After I had told him how fully I endorsed all his praise of Wells's dramatic power, I turned at once to the subject that interested me still more—that of my having found in Wells another of those vagabond-poets in whom he knew I took a special interest.

'I have never met Wells, much as I wanted to do so,' said he. 'He is living on the Continent, and rarely if ever comes to England. When in 1849 I made a trip with Hunt to France and Belgium, I had an idea of going to Brittany expressly to see him. But that never came off. I happen to know that personally he is what you call a vagabond-poet to the very core.'

I then went on to tell him of my meeting with my friend at the Museum, and his talk at the chop-house about the idealized version of the story of Joseph and his Brethren—Jámí's poem, *Yúsuf and Zulaikha*.

'Tell me all about it,' said he, 'I am intensely fond of Oriental stories, and I often wonder why S—— takes so little interest in the mythologies of the East. To me they are quite as fascinating as the stories of the Greek mythology, though, of course, not so beautiful. That wonderful creature FitzGerald translated one of the poems of Jámí,

his masterpiece, I believe, *Salámán and Absál*. Garnett was talking to me about it the last time I saw him.'

'It can't be finer than the story that I was told in the chop-house. It has almost persuaded me to take up Persian.'

'Tell me the story.'

'This is it,' I said. 'While the early part of Joseph's adventures were going on in Canaan, wonderful dreams were being dreamed by a lady in Mauritania. As Zulaikha, daughter of King Taimius, lay a-dreaming at break of day—when the jasmine and violet were just opening their eyes to the dawn—there came the vision to her of a glorious youth, with a dazzling star upon his shoulder, whose beauty took her captive. She woke and found it all a dream; she subsided into melancholy, and pined.'

'Like Badoura in the *Arabian Nights*,' said Rossetti, who was exceedingly familiar with Lane's translation, and in spite of their mannerism admired Harvey's illustrations.

'The dream was repeated three times,' I continued, 'and when at length the vision named "Egypt" as the country of his abode, "Egypt" became to her the world. And when an embassy arrived from a foreign land soliciting her hand, and she learnt that this foreign country was Egypt, and that her suitor was none other than Pharaoh's grand vizier Potiphar, her heart danced with joy. For this is how she reasoned. "Potiphar dwells in Egypt; the beautiful dream-youth dwells in Egypt, ergo Potiphar and he must be one".'

'The logic is irresistible and feminine,' said

Rossetti. 'I feel sure she accepted Potiphar "at a venture".'

'She did, and hurried away with her retinue to Memphis to meet her suitor. When she arrived on the banks of the Nile, hearing the bray of the music, and the acclamations of the people, as Potiphar approached nearer and nearer to meet her, her heart beat more and more violently every moment. Its thump, thump, kept time to the tramp, tramp of his horse's feet.'

'Don't be too dramatic,' said he, 'or I shall think you are inventing all this as you proceed. There is not room in London for two Howells.'

'Ah, I've heard of Howell. The finest *raconteur* in London, is he not?'

'That has been the ruin of him. The finest *raconteur* has often to be the finest liar to keep up his credit. But pray go on.'

'Well, the Princess's longing to peep through the curtains of her gorgeous litter became irresistible. She cut a slit in the curtain and peeped, and lo! instead of the dazzling youth of her dream, there smiled upon her a bland and Oriental fogey, gorgeously apparelled as to dress, but, alas! plain as to features.'

'A Western woman would have accepted the fogey for his rank or his money, and made no more ado about it,' said Rossetti.

'Not so the Oriental,' I said; 'to her—

> The rank is but the guinea stamp,
> The man 's the gowd for a' that.

'As she sat there, pining for the youth of her dreams, the splendours of the vizier's palace were as dust and ashes to poor Zulaikha.'

'If you are not inventing this story, I am sure you are touching it up.'

'Not in the least. It is exactly the story that I was told. But a surprise was awaiting her. There was a certain beautiful slave attending Potiphar—Joseph by name—a Canaanite, whom she soon perceived all the ladies of the Court loved.'

'And loved, I assume,' said Rossetti, 'in the Tommy Moorish way, with an intensity unknown to mere Western amateurs in the art of love, peculiar to ladies whose blest business it is to love all round and do nothing else.'

'Potiphar's wife saw Joseph and knew him at once for the youth of her dreams with the star upon his shoulder. But discretion was the better part of love.'

'Especially in the East,' said Rossetti, with his rich unctuous laugh, 'where the bowstrings of the love-god are so often used for uncomfortable purposes.'

'The lady learnt that Joseph was for sale. Naturally she bought him,' I said.

'Naturally,' said Rossetti, with another chuckle. 'In such a crisis what lady would not bid as boldly as Agnew at Christie's?'

'She bought him—bought him over the head of the great Princess Nasigha, of the race of Aad, whose rage equalled that of the other Court ladies, all of whom were would-be buyers. Joseph responded to his mistress's love.'

'That redeems him from the charge of ill-breeding which S—— brings against the "Scripture" Joseph,' said Rossetti.

'But just as Joseph was on the point of yielding,

the angel Gabriel appeared to him in the likeness of Jacob, his father, and warned him to fly from his perilous position, which he did. He was seized, however, on the false charge, as in the Bible story, and cast into prison. Throughout the story "Potiphar's wife", though working so much mischief, was a heroine still, and her remorseful thoughts followed him in his prison cell. From this point the Bible narrative is taken up, except that in the end Potiphar plays the part of the obliging husband in the modern novel and drama, and dies in order that his widow may marry her lover.'

'Certainly if there is a way of idealizing Potiphar's wife these Persian poets seem to have managed it,' said Rossetti. 'But, somehow the love-part is a little too novelesque and Tommy Moorish. It seems to mar the primitive simplicity of the Bible story. I wonder whether Topsy could do anything with it? I am afraid it would be too much for me.'

In regard to the essential point of telepathic attraction, Morris did in fact run very close to the Persian story when he produced the exquisite episode of the Princess in *The Glittering Plain* sick of love for Hallblithe whom she had never seen.

VI

Rossetti then told me all he knew about Wells's remarkable personality. Wells, he said, was born in London in 1800, three years before the birth of that prince of vagabonds, 'Lavengro.' His parents were comparatively well-to-do. 'They

must', said Rossetti, 'have been of superior intelligence, for they had the Shandean foresight to christen him Charles Jeremiah. If he should turn out to be of the common, cheerful, but thick-blooded British type he could adopt the first name; if he should turn out to be a man requiring "a name that sticks"—a poet, or painter, or a pill-maker—he could adopt the second. A poet of the name of Jeremiah would have attracted attention under any circumstances, whether "vagabond" poet or "respectable" poet. But Wells, with a perversity common to human nature, though he did eventually prove to be a poet, detested the name which Fortune, in the shape of ancestral prescience, had provided for him in that event. Nothing chafed him so much as "Jeremiah", and he always subscribed himself "Charles J. Wells" in the fond belief that "J." would seem to stand for "John".'

From the first it was decided that Wells should be educated for one of the professions. He was sent to a school at Edmonton, 'Where,' said Rossetti, 'he became the schoolfellow of Tom Keats, the younger brother of a certain poet whom *Blackwood's Magazine* immortalized as "Gallipot Keats"; and this fact, as it turned out, influenced Wells's career pretty considerably, for he became acquainted with the "Gallipot poet", and also with certain notable members of Keats's set, among them with R. H. Horne, the author of *Orion*, who was his schoolfellow.'

I myself knew Horne after this. There were, he told me, certain romantic incidents wherein he

and Wells were actors which formed the subject of one of Horne's most charming poems.

It was when Keats was serving his apprenticeship to Hammond, the surgeon, that Wells became intimate with him. Everybody will remember Keats's sonnet to 'A Friend who sent me some Roses'. That friend was Wells.

A mention of him occurs in at least one of Keats's collected letters, but merely of a casual and rather unfriendly kind.

Keats at this time was often seen by Wells and Horne in the street (while Surgeon Hammond was feeling pulses in the houses), sitting in the doctor's gig (to use Horne's words to me), 'his head bent low over the dashboard,' apparently asleep but really dreaming those daydreams of his which have since become so dear to us—'clasping Diana's waist in some mossy grotto of Latmos', or 'eating wild honey beneath shadowing cedars, on some slope of Lebanon'. For no creature was ever so steeped in beauty as was this doctor's apprentice.

That Keats should take to a lad like Wells was perhaps inevitable. Keats's animal spirits were of the exuberant kind, and those who knew Wells in his youth describe him, with his sparkling blue eyes, red curls, and bluff, rather blowsy complexion, as a bright, quick, most piquant lad, overflowing with wit and humour. Wageman's miniature of him as a young man, painted shortly after the appearance of his poem, exactly expresses his character. He did not *look* poetic, it is true; his stumpy figure and his snub nose prevented that, but his spirits were unbounded. His enjoyment of life, in a word, was of that ebullient and

irrepressible kind which Nature bestows only upon her choicest favourites—the vagabonds, whether poets or not. If his love of scholastic studies was not of the strongest—if his syntax in even his mother tongue was uncertain, and his orthography queer (as his letters to me in his latest years testify only too plainly)—it was because his mind was so active that he had time only for the passions and emotions of which language and orthography are, at best, but the accidental and arbitrary symbols.

At school, life had no ills for our vagabond-poet, for while other boys were fretting and fuming over their books, he—as Horne frequently told me—was thinking of fishing and boating, and roaming over heath and meadow, and enjoying himself with companions of his own kind. The imposition of penal tasks and the threat of the cane were greeted with that merry laugh with which throughout his entire long life he met every ill that fate or chance could offer. Now, if there is no temperament so blest as that of the vagabond, there is certainly none so damaging to the one art of all Western civilizations—the art of 'getting on'. He made a butt of Fortune, and failed in life; but he never repined, knowing that, while the vagabond is enjoying himself in the woods and fields, it is the dull dog that gets on.

After leaving school, Wells was for a long time separated from his friend Horne, who was in Mexico. During this time, however, he saw a good deal of Hazlitt and Hazlitt's friends. But of Keats, at this time, he saw but little.

This estrangement arose from a propensity for practical joking which had formerly amused the

poet, as much as it amused his friends. To boys of Wells's temperament hoaxing seems to have been considered fun in those antediluvian times.

With regard to one of Wells's hoaxes the victim was Keats's brother Tom, and, unfortunately, the brother was at the time in an incipient consumption, and the poet believed—erroneously or not—that the hoax aggravated the malady. Anyhow, it lost Wells the friendship of Keats and of most of his set. It is necessary to glance at this, for it is a striking illustration of Wells's instinct for 'not getting on' which I have before remarked upon. However, he was thereby spared the pain of witnessing one of the saddest passages in the pathetic history of English poetry. Although Keats's constitution was of that sensitive kind which in youth is liable to succumb to the assaults of phthisis, all he needed for a few years was, as a medical man told Horne, 'a little peace of mind.' It has long been known that there is no such thing as hereditary consumption, though hereditary lung weakness, at a certain period of life, will lead to consumption unless the conditions of life are very genial. Unluckily, however, the attacks on the 'gallipot poet' were so constant and so spicy that, as Haydon says in his diary, 'on Keats the effect was melancholy. He became morbid and silent, would call and sit for hours, whilst I was painting, without speaking a word.' The milder attacks in the *Quarterly* he did not much heed.

At this time, indeed, he was, according to Haydon, actually speculating as to whether he was not bound in honour to 'call out' one at least of the party. Better, perhaps, if he had done so,

for as the furious little R. H. Horne said to me with frothing mouth, 'he was as bold as a young lion and very pugnacious, and the bullies of "Maga" were, like the race of bullies, of the white-livered kind.' Keats did not do so, however.

The colour of those lovely daydreams of the poet changed. And as to that honey of Lebanon and all the 'spicéd dainties', they had grown bitter as Lokman's gourd; but without Lokman's consolation. Latmos changed to Patmos—a penal isle washed by midnight seas—where, though Diana was to the very last the lady of the dreams, it was Diana striding the pale horse with Death.

Being 'cut by Keats', Wells determined to let him and the entire group know that 'he too could make a mark in literature': such was the theory of his brother-in-law Smith Williams, famous in connexion with *Jane Eyre*, whom I have before had occasion to mention in my essay in the 'World's Classics' on *The Professor*. I had many conversations with him about Wells; among other things he told me that while Keats was at Rome (dying, as it turned out), Wells, without knowing of Keats's sad plight, and in the purest spirit of jocose rivalry, set to work to produce *Stories after Nature*.

And the year following Keats's death at Rome (that is to say, in 1822) this book was published through T. and J. Allman, of Prince's Street, Hanover Square. Though written on the model of Boccaccio, these stories are unique in every way—unique in their defects as in their merits. Their chief and most noticeable feature is that

of a fascinating remoteness not to be found, I fancy, elsewhere, save in metrical composition. He himself, both when he produced them and in after years, valued them far less highly than he valued the triumph of a successful day's fishing or boating. There is a copy of it bound up with a story of Mrs. Gore's in the British Museum, and another copy in the Bodleian Library. A third is in the library of Mr. Buxton Forman.

Let me say here, parenthetically, that after the reprint of *Joseph and his Brethren* in 1876, I wrote to Wells asking him to consent to a like reproduction of *Stories after Nature*, but he refused. A curious thing in connexion with these stories was that years after the original publication in volume form, several of them were printed in the *Illuminated Magazine*, then edited by W. J. Linton and illustrated by Pickersgill the Younger. Perhaps Linton felt himself to be justified in reprinting them as new stories, because stories so stillborn as Wells's were may be called new whenever they come to be reproduced. However, the beautiful story of Claribel, which appeared among them in the *Illuminated Magazine*, was literally new. Linton dramatized it in 1865, and dedicated to Wells the lovely little volume in which it appeared.

Suddenly Wells determined to make another effort, and in another line—which proved to be the right line, inasmuch as it was a dramatic poem, *Joseph and his Brethren ;* the wrong line, as we have seen, in regard to the subject. This book he got Whittakers to publish, at their own expense. When I expressed to Horne my amazement that even a publisher may find his conqueror, he attributed it to Wells's extraordinary persuasive

powers and irresistible charm of manner. In conversation, he told me, Wells had 'the readiest wit and the richest fancy of any man in London. His talk was simply wonderful. He had only to see a man to make him do anything'.

Once having finished the poem, however, he seems to have been as indifferent about its prospects as he had been about the fate of *Stories after Nature*. In a letter before me, written by him to a friend while the poem was in the press, he says that he had actually forgotten the pseudonym under which it was to appear. 'I was at Whittaker's on Monday for my MS. I asked to see G. W. He sent down for my name. Lo! and behold, I had forgot it, and could not, for the life of me, pick it up.' A friend saw the book through the press, the author refusing to undertake that labour, on the principle, I suppose, that if the queen bee condescends to lay eggs, it is not, therefore, a part of her duty to take care of them also.

In 1824 Wells was figuring on the roll of attorneys at about the same time that George Borrow had left the law to devote himself entirely to vagabondage in the open air. The practice of the law, it seems, only suits certain constitutions. Though sturdy enough, Wells found it injurious to his health, and retired to South Wales to shoot and fish. Afterwards he resided for a time at Broxbourne, in Hertfordshire, where again he shot and fished, mixing this, the business of his life, with verse-making. He and Smith Williams founded the Phoenix Boat Club: it soon died; the men who 'pulled together' were all literary men.

VII

'Never', said Rossetti, 'did a book fall more dead from the press than did *Joseph and his Brethren*.' In a letter I received from him he says, 'In searching contemporary journals for reviews of the book, I could find none whatever with the exception of Horne's; all I found was a brief and depreciatory paragraph in the *Annual Register* for 1824.'

The question has often occurred to me, Why did not Hazlitt do something for the book? One day he met Wells in the street and said, 'By the by, Wells, I have read your poem. I consider that it shows great genius; and—I advise you to stick to your profession.' Wells was then practising as a solicitor, and Hazlitt seems to have had a genuine admiration for him.

We all have our literary prejudices, and I will at once confess that I have a deep prejudice against Hazlitt. It came to me in my earliest youth when, in dipping into some old volumes of the *Edinburgh Review* in my father's library, I came upon the shameful attack on *Christabel* which has always been attributed to Hazlitt. I am afraid he was a man scarred by envy, the literary leprosy which is so general that whenever I see an anonymous attack upon a man, I know that he who made it is an unsuccessful worker in the field where his victim works. But apart from the circumstances above narrated, the neglect the book suffered must always remain a striking example of the way in which the prosperity of any work of art, from a joke to an epic, depends upon the mind of the public to which it

is addressed. For there is a tide in the affairs of books which must be taken at the flood. It is a popular error to suppose that, in a good book, there is some fate-impelling power which will save it from perishing, even though it may miss its mark at first. Science tells us that, in the struggle for life, the surviving organism is not necessarily that which is absolutely the best in an ideal sense though it may, indeed, must, be that which is most in harmony with surrounding conditions. It is the same in art. For instance, during the greater part of my intimacy with Whistler, which was in the seventies, when I used to be seeing him almost every day, Tom Taylor wrote that 'Whistler's painting, like his penning, was a joke'; and I myself used to be scoffed at because I protested in various periodicals that he had qualities that set him apart from his contemporaries. Now I am scoffed at if I do not admit that his portrait of Miss Alexander is the finest picture in the world. The fact is, like Shah Mahmoud, the world wakes up in a new mood every morning, and every morning must that mood be pampered. And, as after us the deluge comes, the wisest artist may, as the Merry Andrew in *Faust* seems to think, be he who attends to 'contemporary fun' and leaves Prince Posterity to do his joking and singing and painting for himself. Good books may perish, and do. As to the cause of failure in this case, that has been discussed a few pages back, and Wells's old friend Horne quite agreed with my opinion that the name given to it had a good deal to do with the failure. Indeed, he told Wells so. But was there not yet another cause for the fate of *Joseph and his*

Brethren? Had not Wells's own indifference something to do with it?

To do the world justice, it receives poetry in much the same temper as that in which it is given. If, for instance, you say to the world, 'Here is a poem: *I* don't think much of it myself—what is *your* opinion?' the world is not so rude as to gainsay your appraisement. Wells was in the habit of speaking of his poem as 'litter', and treating it as such. The world—thinking that he who produced it must know best if his own work is 'litter'—was sufficiently well-mannered to treat it as 'litter' too, handing over the sheets which never had a chance of being bound into volumes to the grocers and cheesemongers, who at that time did what the beneficent pulp-makers do now with literature. These worthies knew at once what to do with it (for, alas! in those days—before the days of pulp,—the printed page of a poem was often better acquainted with bread and cheese than was the lost wanderer from Arden who wrote it). But, besides this, Wells, without receiving much support from the Hunt set, was neglected by others for belonging to it.

It is fortunate, however, that the heart of the true vagabond-poet is never shattered as is the heart of his 'respectable' brother when his poems come to grief. Not in the least degree is his soul shrivelled by such a disaster. On the contrary, its effect upon him is just to make him a more incorrigible vagabond than ever. In other words, the vagabond-poet is the very opposite of the kind of bard who is pricked into song by fussiness, as according to the gipsies the nightingale is

pricked into music by sitting on a thorn. Happy the bard who does not think with the Hayslope cock of immortal memory that 'the sun rises to hear him crow'. In Wells there was but little of the temperament of the lyrist; and, of course, between the dramatist and the lyrist the difference of temperament is one of kind. In only a few are they found united.

One man, however, was not so acquiescent in the world's and the author's verdict upon *Joseph and his Brethren*—my old friend Horne, the author of 'the Farthing Epic'. He advised Wells to stick to poetry, who had, it seems, after all, failed to take Hazlitt's advice to stick to law. Under Horne's advice Wells would begin to work upon a play, select the strongest scenes and work upon them, and then throw them up in despair of finding a market for them.

Meantime he had married Miss Hill, of Leamington, whereby he became connected with Smith Williams, from whom I obtained a mass of most interesting facts in connexion with Wells's life.

Not another line of dramatic poetry did Wells print after this, though, according to Mr. Buxton Forman—the best of all authorities upon subjects pertaining to Wells, or indeed to any member of his remarkable set—he went on writing somewhat copiously in that line, but he invariably ended by destroying what he wrote. Fortunately, Wells was able to leave England and live on the Continent, and enjoy himself in the only way possible to him. He was no more heard of in literature, save that he contributed to the volume called *Chaucer Modernized*, edited by Horne, in 1841, a sonnet to Chaucer. This, however, was dated

1823. And, after this, Wells printed in *Fraser's Magazine* two papers on boar-hunting in Brittany.

VIII

After Wells went to live on the Continent, the grocers and cheesemongers, those sovran patrons of song, who, as I have said, used to buy poetry by the stone, even as the pulp-makers now buy it by the hogshead, had been busy with *Joseph and his Brethren*—so busy that, with the exception of some half-dozen copies at most, the book in less than half a century seems to have perished altogether.

Everybody, the author especially included, had forgotten all about it—everybody except the author's old Edmonton schoolfellow, Horne. When Horne became editor of the *Monthly Repository*, he managed to give a long notice of Wells (New Series, No. 123, March, 1837); and afterwards, in the *New Spirit of the Age*, he made a passing allusion to him in an article on *Festus*. And, in the same year, Thomas Wade was very rude to 'the world' for its 'neglect' of a poem which he compared with *Antony and Cleopatra*, amongst other things. Then *Joseph and his Brethren* settled down in the peaceful dust-bin of oblivion apparently for ever.

And yet, after all its vicissitudes, *Joseph and his Brethren* was a lucky book, as we shall see. Among the various eyes under which came Horne's notice in the *New Spirit of the Age* it fell under one pair which were the corporeal windows to a mind

more notable in matters of poetry and art for its rebelliousness against the Moloch authority than any other of the last century—a mind which has proved itself a 'fountain' for many a 'reservoir'. Rossetti was led by Horne's notice to look up Wells's poem at the British Museum, and, on coming away, he startled every one by declaring that he had found a poem which was 'more Shakespearean than anything else out of Shakespeare'.

Rossetti's judgement was fully endorsed by several of the men of genius to whom, on various occasions, running over many years, he introduced the poem. Among these was Mr. Swinburne, then at Oxford, who was even at that time more learned in Elizabethan poetry than most of those who make the special study of it the occupation of their lives. Mr. Swinburne's enthusiasm equalled Rossetti's own. He wrote an essay upon it, which was sent by a friend to *Fraser's Magazine*. This was before he had made a name. Froude declined the article. So *Joseph and his Brethren* had thirteen years more in the dust-bin before mentioned.

Rossetti's interest in the poem had never flagged.

Wells, as I have said, went to reside in Brittany, and here, at Quimper, he spent many years of his life after 1840. Finally he settled at Marseilles, whence I received several letters from him.

After settling in Brittany he was at least once in London, where he met Linton. He was then quite young-looking and strong. In 1850 his wife, who was not indifferent about his fame, came to London with the view of getting *Joseph and his Brethren* republished. Rossetti did what he could to aid her, and began a correspon-

dence with Wells, which resulted in his producing a revised copy of the poem. From that copy large extracts were introduced into Mr. Swinburne's essay.

Rossetti had previously got into correspondence with Wells, who, with interest in his own work a little aroused at length, made a fresh manuscript, in which much was improved. Efforts were now made by Smith Williams to get the poem reprinted, and Rossetti (who was then about twenty or twenty-one) offered to make illustrations for it. But 'no publisher would look at it'. Mr. Swinburne, in his eloquent essay on Blake, tried to direct attention to 'the dramatic passion', 'the dramatic characterization', and 'the dramatic language' of 'Mr. Wells's great poem'. All in vain. And now the known copies had dwindled down to about three, for the dreadful 'borrower' had attacked it. Mr. George Meredith also tried to get a publisher for it, and failed. Mr. Swinburne then gave the manuscript of his essay to me and it lay in my desk for some years. At last it occurred to me to try Messrs. Chatto and Windus. Mr. Chatto, on reading Mr. Swinburne's rejected article, and the copious extracts from the poem which it contained, offered to publish it, suggesting that the essay should first be printed in some magazine, in order to prepare the public for the poem. This was easily done now that *Atalanta* had made the writer famous. The essay appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, where it attracted considerable attention. And then at last the poem itself—in the revised form—was before the public, and got its chance at last of winning its place in English literature.

The revised copy which had passed through Mr. Swinburne's hands was no longer to be found, Wells or some friend of his having mislaid it. Wells had made a fresh revision, however; and this he ultimately gave to Mr. Forman, who had consented to see through the press the new edition printed from it. It is, of course, still in Mr. Forman's library.

It was through Williams at first that I communicated to Wells the fact that I had at last found a publisher to reprint *Joseph and his Brethren*. But here again his laziness and indifference stopped the way, and had it not been for the admirable carefulness and intelligence of Mr. Buxton Forman, it is impossible to say what sort of an appearance the book would have made, or whether it would have appeared at all. Enriched as it was by Mr. Swinburne's masterly tribute, the volume could not but command attention.

Between 1845 and 1850 Wells sent to Smith Williams an historical romance called, I think, *Gaston de Blondeville*; but though Williams thought highly of it, the novel lacked that something without which no novel can find a market. Besides this he wrote several volumes of verse, which he destroyed at his wife's death.

Shortly before his wife visited London in 1850, Wells had—so Williams used to say—developed a faculty which is, I think, rare among modern poets: he had just created a great sensation in Brittany by raising from the dead, through prayer, a young lady of a distinguished family. I cannot recall any other poet who has had a

success of this kind. That, however eccentric, he was a deeply religious man, is manifest. In a letter written to one of the Hill family in 1824, which I have seen, his chief complaint against his friend, Dick Bateman, is that he 'has no sense of the religion of *Joseph and his Brethren*'.

Wells had a son, an eminent engineer, and at least one daughter, who went into a French convent. He died at Marseilles on February 17, 1879.

THEODORE WATTS-DUNTON.

JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

JACOB, *the Patriarch.*

REUBEN.
SIMEON.
LEVI.
GAD.
ASHER.
DAN.
JOSEPH.
JUDAH.
ISSACHAR.
ZEBULUN.
NAPHTALI.
BENJAMIN.
} *Jacob's Sons.*

PHARAOH, *King of Egypt.*
POTIPHAR, *a Ruler.*
Pharaoh's Butler.
Chief Baker.
Steward.

PHRAXANOR, *Potiphar's Wife.*
Attendant on Phraxanor.

Ishmaelites, Magicians, Officers, Attendants, Ambassadors, Guards, Egyptians, Harvestmen, &c.

ACT I

Prologue

In the dim age when yet the rind of earth,
Unworn by time, gave eager nature life,
Zealous to furnish what the seasons wore
That in a vigorous brightness flourishèd;
When light and dark and constellations bright,
The splendid sun, the silent gliding moon,
Govern'd men's habits; taught them when to thrive,
To rest, and sleep; till, full of temperate years,
Rude in their art, and ignorant of all
Save passions and affections wild, untaught,
They sank like giants in an earthy pit,
Leaving the generation of their days
'Twixt grief and reverence to mourn their loss
And miss them from the village and the field;—
God's voice (that mingled up the beauteous world,
Inlaid pure heaven, and sweetly colour'd it;
And with the wondrous magic of the clouds
Enveils the sacred flooring evermore,
Without bright golden, but within more rare)
Was then upon the earth and with men's ears
Creating reverence and faith and love.—
Jacob was gone into the vale of years:
And like an oak that standeth by a hill,
Whose sinuous trunk begins to fret to dust,
And sapless knots fail in their iron strength;

Whose wrinkled branches drying up with age,
Stiff to the winds, with top emblanch'd and bare,
Though but poor spoil to winter in its leaves,
Yet still it casts a shadow o'er those slips
That from its acorns dropp'd into the earth
From time to time, and settled, flourished there
To keep its memory fresh in seasons new
When it is wither'd to the sodden core,
And all its beauty faded from the earth:
Like to that tree that faileth on the hill
Is agèd Jacob with the wither'd arms,
And like its fruit that chanc'd to spring and grow,
Are Jacob's sons that put their promise forth;
And like the guardian shadow from the tree
Is Jacob's yearning full of love for them.
To Bethel was he come with all his host,
His herds and flocks, and men both bond and free,
By God's command to sojourn in the land.
Down in a valley deep and overbrow'd
With sloping pastures skirted round with beech
Shadowing the grazing cattle in the breeze,
E'en in this vale of Hebron did he halt,
And set his tent (rude habitation)
To wait with patience the will of Him
Supreme in Heaven, on Earth; for He had said
'Thy seed shall grow and flourish in the land,
Outnumbering the sea-sand. Grace shall be thine.
My countenance is with thee. Go, and live.'

Of all his sons, Joseph, a gentle youth,
Tender in years, graceful, and full of strength,
Pleas'd Jacob most; most fill'd his doting mind,
Nourished his sight, and charm'd his doubting ear.
Well might it be; for he was yet the child
Of his declining years, reflecting on

His youthful vigour in those days now pass'd
When the grown men Reuben and Simeon
Were yet but children gleaning in his corn,
Merry, and apt to profit by that lore
(Or rather simple industry) that kept
The image of their Maker fine and clear
With wholesome viands, food of a beaded brow.

Rachel his wife, and Joseph's mother, died
Midway between this Bethel and her home;
And solemnly she was laid up in earth
Hard by the highway, and a pillar set,
Call'd by her name; a tomb of elder years,
Old monument of man's affection!
For this he lov'd young Joseph, but the more
That he was kind and tender to his sire;
Sober'd his youth, and calm'd his sprightly tongue;
And like a mantle warm and comfort-lined
Cover'd his father from all outward frets;
And love for love return'd in such a sort,
So full of reverence, mild, and duteous,
That it flow'd blandly from his genial breast
And mingled in his being, making his sire
Taste the sweet sympathy of unripe age,
Which could not be in those his other sons
More old, more independent in their love.
But there was mischief to this human faith
Born of the very goodness that it bred,
For Joseph's brethren fretted on the lip,
Wrinkled their brows, and smote upon the earth
With boisterous foot, whence envy leapèd out.
The best would group together in the shade,
And sitting 'neath the eglantine and vine
That wreath'd a verdurous trellis through the vale,
Would scoff at Jacob's love, that still was spilt

(As they would say) unequal on that side
Where Joseph kept his stand. Envy, the slug,
Had ta'en its second change, and like a worm
Stray'd from its blinder chrysalis the brain,
And nimble as the blood that scours the veins
Lay keenly gnawing in their rancour'd hearts.

The shepherd beats his bell; the tranquil herds
Lowing obedience, from the dimpled spring
(Where the bright flowers disturbed with their sweet breath
Tremble like starry gems in Dian's hair),
Slow wind the hill, and in their stakèd folds
Snuff the fresh straw and scent the keener wind,
Crook their sleek knees to welcome night's repose.
The Sun while sinking from his daily round
Had starr'd the heavens like a fiery flaw,
Showing his glory greater than the west:
Glancing the Moon and frighting her faint beam,
Across the barrèd portals of the East
His fulgent heat reflected glowing fire.
The dying embers of the burnish'd king,
Now sunk behind the mountain'd hemisphere,
Were fading fast away. He was declin'd
(Not like pale Cynthia to her bath, a lake
Rich in its violet sward and jasmine bowers),
A god gigantic habited in gold,
Stepping from off a mount into the sea:
The evening breeze that whispers of repose
And fans the crimson'd marygold to sleep,
Grows sharp and brisk; and silence on the light
Gains step for step, as light retires to shade.
The tawny harvestmen from yellow fields
Their sweet repast, their lated meal enjoy
Hard by their tents, beneath some ample oak,

Or vine, or fig-tree burthen'd with its fruit
And fragrant to the air. Now Jacob's sons,
Who kept their herds and cattle on the hills,
Retire from folding to their father's tent.
Lo! Joseph meets them with a welcome smile,—
A basket on his head with purple grapes
O'erswelling from the brink, and o'er his cap,
And hair, and shoulders, hanging gracefully,—
Shows like an angel, youthful, beauteous.
Stifle your passions, curb your spleens, young men;
Dull not this image of your father's mind
By vaporous suggestions of his youth
Which oversteps you in the old man's sight.
Look on his youth; be older, and be wise.

Scene I.—*Outside of Jacob's Tent.*

Enter Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali; *and* Joseph *meeting them.*

Issachar

The weed is at the threshold of our tent
To sting us as we enter. My eye is gall'd,
Seeing how merely all our frowns are lost
And overlaid in his smooth courtesy.

Reuben

My brother, you say right. Like to the wind
That gently sleeks the rugged lion's mane,
Sings in his ears, and daunts his savage eye,
So he your anger woos with kindly breath,
Laughs out of mirth, and, looking in your face,
E'en wonders at your wrath.

SIMEON

This Reuben says:
Fruits of his milky disposition.
He counts as nothing all our father's love,
Regard, or praise, or ancient tenderness;
The honour of attending on a flock
Increasing daily 'neath the watchful eye
Of a wise shepherd; husbanding the grain
Craftily sown, with sweating labour gather'd,
And garner'd up with skill: all this is nought:
Knowledge of seasons, lusty pastures green
That fill the cow with milk and fat the lamb,—
The honour and regard which this should buy
Is cast about our brother like a mist;
Yet no more muffled than the goodly Sun
When he begilds the clouds. This new-found star,
This boy has all the praise, the labour we;
Till like a drone he slumbers in our sweets.

REUBEN

I've heard your speech, and freely pardon it.

SIMEON

'Tis just to hate, when love is canker'd thus,
And less than nothing swallows up the whole.
And let me tell you, Reuben, if you fall
Within the limit of my boisterous speech,
So that my censure graze your patience——

REUBEN

Come, peace. I pr'ythee, peace.

SIMEON

Nay, I will speak.

REUBEN

Hold, Simeon! thou'lt get no fear of me.
I am no child to rid thee of thy spleen,
Nor will I back one step for thee or thine.
Silence!—I do command thee. What art thou
Thou younger brother, second unto me,
That thus presumest on my temperance?—
Because my heart is milky, as thou say'st,
And I am nimble, full of exercise,
Not cold and sullen; laugh when the sun shines
bright,
Sing, and rejoice, light as the summer air—
Out of thy gloom and stately pondering
Art thou at once to carve away the love
I bear thyself, my brother, and my sire;
To task my courage and to tempt it too?—
Oh, trust me, Simeon, I have a gall
(Though commonly 'tis overlaid with love),
And such a one, that had the father's son
Of any sire from hence through Canaan
But cast such sore and undeserving words
On my forbearance, had he thrice thy breadth,
And thrice thy skill, I would have grappled him
And ta'en his heart; but, Simeon, for thee,—
There is a past all precious to my breast.
Can I forget our childhood and our youth,
Our scorching labours in the furrow'd field,
The generous drops of emulation
That cours'd along our swart fraternal brows,
Reaping and sowing with a jealous zeal,
The merry winters under the same tent?
Count o'er the days we've fed at the same board,
The nights we have repos'd on the same skins,—
Thou wilt not wonder then to find my heart

O'erflowing thus in fellowship and love.
Can I forget the many days gone by,
The weeks, and months, and comfortable years,
And raise my hands in any other way
Than thus outspread to clasp thee to my neck?—
Lo! see young Joseph weeps.—

ISSACHAR

So do not I.

REUBEN

The worse for Issachar.

JOSEPH

Alas, my brethren!
Come not to words for such a thing as I.
I am but worth your loves and not your wrath,
Which never shows but it augments my grief.
What have I done, or wherein thought amiss?
If to our parent I am dutiful,
It is because his happiness is mine:
I do no more than every youthful son
Should practise on the age of such a sire.
No end have I in this, indeed; no wish
To put your image further from his breast,
Blemish your names (a thing I never thought),
Or place my childhood 'fore your graver years.
Perhaps you think your birthright tempts me on;
That I would work upon our father, so
That all your well-earn'd interest should to seed
While mine would bloom and grow?—Why, this
is weak:
For still the power is yours to take it back
(And justice too), for cozening the age
Of our good sire. Yet this must be the cause:

For nought else I have done, I'm well assur'd,
But tend my father as my duty bids.—
Forget your frowns; and throw my innocence
Food to your hate, and grieve the while 'tis raven'd.

ISSACHAR

I have a mind to strike him.

JUDAH

Patience awhile:
Offer no spleen before our father's tent;
Each one pass by him mute, and each unload
The burthen of contempt full in his eye.

REUBEN

Love, like the dew upon the myrtle tree,
Is thus bedashèd with a raven wing,
And swath'd in its own fragrance.

ISSACHAR

Witherèd be his heart. I'll lead the way.

REUBEN

Oh! you do keep your pity in a cage
And whip it to a starv'd obedience.—
Our father comes. Forbear.

Enter JACOB

JACOB

What 's this?—Cannot I kneel
And breathe my evening prayer for your preserving,
But you will fright the Angel from my thought
With waspish clamour from your evil throats?—
Come hither, Joseph.—Up, my boy; ne'er weep.

Cast down the grapes, the fruits and figs you bear,
That were to sup their graceless, hungry lips;
Down with them in the mire close to their feet;
And since they throw away the love of men
As 'twere but the contemnèd rind of life,
Like their own oxen let them stoop and feed,
Befitting their wild passions; for I swear,
Nought shall they eat or drink from off my board
Until the dawn: nor then unless their love
Be-curd and thicken, and their anger melt
Like icicles away.

JUDAH

We grieve, indeed,
That you, so partial, stint us of your love.

JACOB

A lie!—a lie!—You envy this young slip.
Wilt thou teach me, thou climbing, scanty elm,
With joints unsettled, and with eye amaz'd,
Full of fantastic ignorance and youth;
Me, who have kept my brow upon men's deeds
More than six times thine observation
(Being so much more thine age, six times as wise,
Stricken in body, but mature in mind)—
Will you tell me your love degrades you thus?
Do I not know when favours are bestow'd
On young deservers, ye who lag behind
Make wings of envy, forkèd round with spleen;
And, like the foul and ugly bats of night,
Fan him to sleep, and from an artery
Directly channell'd from the heart, you suck
More valiant blood?—I have a fear of you;
For envy might lead men to cast poor stones
At heaven while it thunders; death waits on it;

On hatred still it feeds and hideous dreams,
And, like a serpent, tracks its victim's heels.
In meanness it begins; proceeds to blood;
And dies of sallow horror by itself.
If it could take the glory that it kills,
It were more nobly bad; but bad indeed,
While it but sweeps it from before its eye,
And like a spider (but more like a flower)
Blends it to earth beneath a fretful foot.

JOSEPH

Oh, sir! long time my brothers must have seen
That I may often grieve, but cannot hate.
But since more patience doth beget more spleen,
More tameness harsher words, more grief desire,
I shall take up the manhood they let fall,
Retreat to what defence of mind I have,
And, fortified with conscious honesty,
Tremble no more like to a troubled spring
That every hail-drop shakes with timid fear;
But front them and confront them as I may:
Like to a brother answering their rebukes
With all the sense and wisdom that I have;
Not like my father's bondmen in the stall.—
Why should I not? They act as if the world,
And all the nations wide, and cities wall'd,
Were no such things: as if this spot of ours,
Our fields, our cattle, were the all in being.—
Would they be envious, let them then be great,
Envy old cities, ancient neighbourhoods,
Great men of trust, and iron-crownèd kings;
For household envy is a household rat;
Envy of state a devil of some fear.
For me—this Bethel limits not my sight;
For in imagination I can see

Countries beyond, nurs'd by the wit of man,
Wiser in harvest, greater in defence,
With state and pomp and majesty serene:
E'en in my sleep my mind doth eat strange food,
Enough to strengthen me against this hate.
With you, my brethren, I was binding sheaves,
When mine arose and stood in front of yours,
And yours bent grievous low unto the ground:
Nay, more, (yet think me not irreverent),
The sun, and moon, and the eleven stars
Sank, and obey'd me; which is sure a sign
That I am greater than my sire and ye,
However passive in humility;
Be it in love, or act, I leave to time.
Or Heaven of purpose put this in my view,
Or else my mind being troubled of the grief
Of your displeasures, vain of some great power,
Might fancy this in sleep. I do not know;
But feel resolv'd no more to plague my heart,
While you, my brothers, treat me with such scorn.

JACOB

Joseph, the eye of Heav'n is on thee:
Shall I and all thy brethren bow us down?—
So be it, if the will of God be so;
And this thy dream foretelleth such event.

SIMEON

The moon is risen: shall we in and sup?

JACOB

No—not with me; your faces are too dull.
Moody displeasure sits upon your brows,
And conscious malice being over-aw'd
Turns short upon disgust. The time has been

When I have govern'd well the nimble flail
From morning until night; bedash'd the grain,
And stiffen'd not with labour; now I am old:
But could I borrow from my lusty youth,
This staff I carry here to stay my steps
Should strike obedience from you.—Go, and mend!—
Reuben, will you come in and sup with us?

REUBEN

All honour to my father. I am pleas'd
To tend my brothers in the outward tent.
[*Exeunt* JACOB *and* JOSEPH.

SIMEON

So—Reuben, is this well? It cannot last.

ISSACHAR

Oh, surely not; for those who run so swift
Must stop for want of breath.

LEVI

I know not, I:
Yet I do think our honest services
Deserve a better treatment than they meet.

NAPHTALI

I hate this Joseph.

JUDAH

So, Naphtali, do I;
He frets me like a thorn beneath the skin.
Not Jacob's anger, nor a host of sires
Can breed so much affection in my heart
E'en as a drop of dew.

ZEBULUN

Oh, I am sick!—
Why should a fellow here, made up of dreams,
With blue and beaming eyes and snaking hair,
Born after us so far, so green in years,
Vault like a nimble leaper at one jump
Between our sire and us, and charm his sight
Like to a subtle serpent in a brake?
As well to build a wall 'tween us and him!

DAN

When I was young I was not spoilèd thus.
Turn'd in the winter forth to break the ground;
In burning summer made to drive afield;
Fasting and thirsting, often have I cast
My weary body 'neath a shady tree,
Too overwrought to seek our shelter out.
What is this Joseph made of—this nice youth—
That he to manhood claims a daintier way?
What are his limbs that they must clothe so warm?
What is his head that it must lie so soft?
What is his mettle, when the greatest deed
He ever does is, storm a wild bee's nest?

SIMEON

Thou oracle and champion of all this,
Reuben, I prythee in cool reason say,
Out of thine abstract honesty of thought,
Does not our father 'bate us in regard,
Labour to lay it upon Joseph's head;
And at all times by thought and word and deed,
O'erlooking us, reflect on him a worth
That he has neither earn'd nor yet deserv'd?
Lastly, his passion borders on revenge;

Suspicion leaps to serve him to the brink
Even of blood. He sees us like to shades
With instruments of death and brows severe
Ready to blight the image of the mind.

REUBEN

No more! No more!—come, let us in and sup.
This awkward after-quest of thine bespeaks
The evil thou dost deprecate, as truth.
Shame comes of such equivocation.

SIMEON

This will not serve. Thou canst not answer me.

REUBEN

Nor am I bound; for if I sometimes speak
For general quiet and the love of peace,
I bargain not to hunt each flying thought
That breaketh cover from thy brambly mind;
But since I see contempt upon thy front,
Forestallèd triumph in thy sullen eye,
I'll answer thee, and with the simple truth
Defend myself, defeat thy argument
That in quaint cunning terms doth challenge me.
I'll give thee ground, and shame thee.—Say, our sire
Garlands his sprightly Joseph with his love,
Keeps him like honey in the winter stor'd
To feast the scanty comfort of his age:
Old men are full of years and full of pain,—
The world's worn out, to them, a garment us'd,
And novelty, the salt of youth, is dead.
Say they can cheat rude sadness with some joy
That lives in fancy and beguiles the mind,—
Is he not cruel who such comfort lames

(Like a rich beggar of a precious thing),
Crying, 'Give me, I pr'ythee, thy regard;
I am right worthy, and I cannot bear
To see thy dotage sloven'd on a child?'
In sooth, I inwardly rejoice to see
The lucid pleasure in our father's eye,
(Like to the sun piercing a watery cloud)
When Joseph sings, or speaks a merry thought.
The pang of envy touches not my breast;
And did you love our sire, you'd rather be
The most forgotten reed upon a pipe,
Than mar the harmony his choice could breed,
With the loud discord of your ill content.
Say Jacob's choleric and sharp of speech;
It ever was the trick of thwarted age.
Why, ye are choleric and wroth, though young.
And trust me, sirs, our imperfections
Will follow age, nor die before the man,—
Rather as weeds nourished by habitude,
That overgrow the rotten outer fence,
Augment with plenitude of years: while life
Is life, man to the last is ever man.
The common fault is yours, and this it is—
All excellence in others you expect,
Ne'er looking backward to the lack within.
What right have you, ye disobedient boys,
To tax our father, whether right or wrong?
Is it his snowy beard that makes ye bold?
His honour'd head grac'd with the remnant curls?
His shoulders stoop'd, upholden by a staff?
His body worn to keep you warm in youth?
Is it because his love is old and good
That rear'd you up, gave you your flocks and herds,
And taught you how to tend them and to thrive,
And kept you from the stalls of other men,

Base bondmen hired for a scanty meal?
Is it because he holds you dear and warm
E'en as the life-blood coursing through his veins?
Trust me, my brethren, he hath goodly cause
(Though it appears not but to those who think)
Why he should hug young Joseph to his heart.
Rachel, his mother, perish'd by the way,
Whom Jacob lov'd with rare affection;
And he, too, falling past his mellow years,
With earthly love grew fond of this same youth,
And as men cling unto the hope of life
E'en in the awful passage of stiff death,
So age doth fondle o'er the acts of youth,
And half re-lives those joys and hopes again;
When memory from dark oblivion calls
So long supine our former selves to life,
Making an hour of such deep repose
Worth all the life to come. Indeed, indeed,
Such things as these will meddle with the heart.
Come, brethren, let us in and woo our sire,
For it is dangerous, and tempting Heaven,
To harbour hate, where duty bids us love.

SIMEON

Well, I will go, yet 'tis against my will:
My feet obey your words; my mind remains
In stubborn pain, the prisoner of my breast.

ISSACHAR

This honey'd Reuben steals away my brain.—
Well, I will in; be gay and cheerful too;
That he may think my anger cheaply bought
For a few sugar'd words. Come! In with him!
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*Outside of Jacob's Tent.—Time, Noon.* JACOB *and* JOSEPH.

JACOB

Keep thou this counsel sacred in thine ear,
For 'tis a treasure richer than a star.

JOSEPH

Sir, I am prone to love it, apt to think,
To find fresh proofs; and I have wonder'd oft
How many tribes and nations overlook
God's greatness in His works, and cast the praise
Upon some lifeless object deified—
Out of the grossness of their earthward mind.
To me a simple flower is cloth'd with thoughts
That lead the mind to Heaven.

JACOB

Why, that is much:
There is no work, the meanest on the earth,
Matter, or thing, but 'tis so nicely cast
By the great Master-hand, and so set off
In beauty's mask, or else consistent truth,
That he must have a mind that 's all contempt,
Jealous, and crude, who could deny the task
To have been pattern'd by a Deity:
Or else his knowledge, aiming past the heavens,
Falls back upon his ignorance and dies.
Many there be who worship certain stars,
The ruling planet, or some lesser light,
Or some rude image wrought of their own hands,
Being brimful of self. Ill sense of being,
To scorn the giant and applaud the dwarf,
Because the first is greater than ourselves;

And keeps imagination in the slips,
While Faith, a prisoner wrapt about in chains,
Stands blind beside. Oh, lowly ignorance!
To think the Being, who could fashion us,
Give us impassion'd minds, affections strong,
Put fire into the sun, and poise the world,
Garnish the seasons, and clothe all the earth
Varied and beauteous, and over all
Cast such a canopy as this above,
Would meanly hide Him in an idol's shrine,
Dire object of His malediction!
Better to think in holiness and love
That God looks on our earth invisibly,
And fills the mighty space above our heads,
Splendid and glorious in His majesty,
More than the mind of man dare ape to think.

JOSEPH

Late as I lay upon a shock of corn,
With musing eye following my dreamy thought,
Likening the clouds to cities far away,
A falcon sail'd majestic in my view:
This way and that he turn'd his peering head
(Like a besieger in a peaceful town),
Keen and sagacious, bent on shedding blood:—
Herein, said I, doth God proclaim Himself;
Blending His excellence in varied powers
All tending to some purpose apt and wise,
An object answer'd and an end attain'd;
Yea, more than man seeing can comprehend,
Or, comprehending, can admire enough,
Being a brighter image last design'd
And form'd to rule and govern; be obey'd
By all earth's creatures, subjects of His will.
I doubt not God's existence nor His power,

Am touch'd with reverence, and touch'd with love.
The golden mazes of the serpent's scales
Dazzling the light and foiling the sun's beams,
Odours of violets blooming in the spring,
The bird that chuckleth in the musky vale,
Silence and sound, the tranquil light and shade,
The orient sunflower, and the blossom'd spray,
The dell and mountain, water bosom'd wide,
In wordless eloquence unto the heart
Speak of sweet grace, and power, and beauty rare.
God did descend to form such excellence;
We must ascend to comprehend it done.
Then what is He who mouldeth all these things,
Merely, as 'twere, for exercise of truth?
And what are we who look on them and die?
The children of His mercy? nor forlorn
And cold into our bosoms will return
Our mortal yearnings, seeing we're allied
To all the truth and beauty He has made;
For He who fashion'd us from forth His love,
Made us so fair, surrounded us with good,
Out of His love will think of us in death.

JACOB

Joseph, my comfort, thou beguil'st mine ear—
Yea, and my eyes of some few gentle drops:
I bless thee from the middle of my heart.
Yet, Joseph, there is one thing far above
Matters extern and objects of the view;
It is, the mind of man, frank fellowship;
A fair affection brac'd and bounded in
By honesty and love, in word and deed—
Yea, more, in thought and look,—yea, further still,
E'en in the faintest limits of surmise:
Never to bear thy neighbour hard in hand,

Nor break thy faith, nor trespass on his peace;
So as thou hop'st the Power above will deal
With mercy to thine imbecility.
This must be thine; then will thy hours be glad,
Joyful thy days, thy years be long and full:
Calamity, the giant of the earth,
Will know thee free, and veil his iron club,
Saying to sorrow, 'Visit not that man,
He looks beyond us:—Ill men fear his frown:
All good tongues drop of manna to his praise.'

JOSEPH

Years and desire, conducting in their hands
Knowledge and wisdom, will sow full my time
With the fresh seeds of this most ruling truth;
And God, the master both of it and us,
Seeing a simple and a willing child,
As helpless as a flower in the blast,
Will give me patience to sustain those rubs
That stand betwixt a mortal and his grave.

JACOB

Amen! Amen! Oh, Joseph! what a joy
Thy words diffuse over my latter life.
Thy voluble tongue, sweet as a viol play'd
To heavenward anthems in a mellow eve,
Lives in my contemplation with delight.
Thy tongue is but the scholar of thy heart,
Repeating faithfully what that records.

JOSEPH

Sooth, there is no such merit in all this
(Though to do duty claimeth some fair praise);
For merit breedeth its own sweet reward,
As vice and folly do their sting and chains.

The little commerce I have had doth show
There is an honest beauty in the world,
Which he who loves, is lov'd again by it;
Reflecting, like an angel, in such sort
The merit, worth, and value of our deeds,
As evil never knows, nor e'er can taste:
Therefore 'tis wise and gainful to be just,—
Bringing so large a price as fair content
(A brooding dove within a patient heart).

JACOB

Live faithful to this precept, and be great,—
Go to thy brethren (down in Shechem's vales
They keep their herds this day) and bring me word
How they have found the pastures and the springs;
And if their cattle thrive upon the ground.

JOSEPH

Thy blessing.——I am gone.

[*Exeunt* JACOB *and* JOSEPH *severally.*

SCENE III.—*A Vale at Dothan.*

REUBEN, SIMEON, LEVI, JUDAH, ISSACHAR, ZEBULUN, DAN, NAPHTALI, *as Shepherds.*

REUBEN

This Dothan pleases me: the air is sweet;
The plain brow'd by the alpine forest round
Escapes the burning glances of the sun:
The faded leaves of autumn nourish it,
Laid by the wind like summer's winding-sheet,
Begetting vigorous substance for the spring,
So that the herbage and the greener food
Thrive within rankness.

ZEBULUN

The grass is thick with flowers upon crisp stalks
Full of the juicy virtues of the place:
A rainbow garland for the brow of spring
With globèd clover full of honey-dew
And sweeter than the cowslip.

ISSACHAR

It is well:
But I prefer the hardier mountain-side,
That 's dry and bleak and rough and barely clad.—
The sickly flowers of the o'er-moisten'd flats
But pulp your cattle with a sullen rot.
This guarding wood fencing the rush of wind
Still keeps the evil close about their hides;
The hollow blast that rolls about the hills
Would blow them whole and hardy.

NAPHTALI

Was it not
In some such place as this, since many years,
When we were taking honey through the woods,
Some dozen wolves, whetting their gory fangs,
Had got about a heifer hunted down
And mangled to the bones: then we leapt in
And with our travelling staves with iron heads
Gave battle to them, having made a ring;
And, spite of savage opposition,
We put such mettle in our dangerous play,
As slew them all?

DAN

I do remember, too,
That Reuben had a cloak made of their skins

In honour of our sport; or rather that
We thought him coward, and to trembling given,
But found the sinews of his courage grew
Stronger with danger; for that Issachar
Being beset, having more work than hands,
He leapt into the peril, and thereby
Drawing their fury chiefly on himself
Defeated it.

ISSACHAR

It was brave work, I swear.

SIMEON

No, do not so.

ISSACHAR

What?

SIMEON

Swear: Reserve thy oath;
For lo! now by the brow of yonder hill
Comes one who more deserves it at your hands
Than idle thoughts.

ISSACHAR

I had no oath to swear:
Or if I had, whoe'er he be that comes,
It could not be forestall'd. I have no feud.
No quarrel now in hand with any man.

SIMEON

Bethink thee, and then look.

ZEBULUN

'Tis Joseph comes!

ISSACHAR

If it be so, I do recall my peace;
Not leaving so much to my fingers' ends
As keeps the stone from flying from my hand.
What then? Are we not even to be fear'd?
Why comes he here to trouble our repose?

SIMEON

Oh! what cares he? Our hate and his content
Are bond and free: we ever bound to frown,
While he is pleas'd to smile because we frown.
He doth usurp our place and privilege,
Counting the dew-drops of our cares and pains
With young and wanton eye, most like unto
Some steward's son: keeps tent within the shade,
Or when the day is damp or overcharg'd,
Or the presumptuous sun looks hotly out,
And airs for appetite in soothing eves,
Which needs is sickly, being got as 'tis,
Of idleness, not sweating industry;
Wherefore his dishes must be nicely sauc'd,
While we crib in the hedge, and dip at springs.

ISSACHAR

I love my dog somewhat, for he will share
My watchfulness and patience; but were he
To have reserv'd, the profit of my thrift,
The sweet and priceless virtue of my gains,
House in a cage of gold, and on the woof
Of soft Egyptian cloth, supinely stretch'd,
Slumber in gorgèd sloth, while I was tim'd
To face the elements,—I could not loathe
His carnal and detested privilege
More than I do this brother Joseph's face,
Who looks so sightly on our grievances.

SIMEON

Yonder he comes. Look at him, Issachar.
How merry and how wayward in his walk,
Poising his staff for very idleness.

ISSACHAR

My eye already dooms him.—It is he.

NAPHTALI

That coat of many colours which he wears,
Spotted about with our dear father's love,
Is foully spotted; for in every one
A favour sticks that 's gather'd at our hand,
And in its place neglect and scorn are left,
Making him rich and proud in the array
That 's borrow'd of our smiles and temperance.

DAN

Our coats be of one colour,—so should his.

ISSACHAR

Why let it then, nor mumble o'er your wrongs
Like feeble women at a friend's decease;
But raise your hands and brush your grief away.
That coat he honoureth with all his heart
Should wear its livery. If it were steep'd
In sundry drops of blood let loose from thence,
Its colour were more comely to our eyes.
A puling, whimpering boy—he is no more—
And he to keep our number on the fret
With all this bone and sinew on our side!—
I have no patience that we are so tame!

DAN

Go to! I am not tame—that 's not my case.

ZEBULUN

Nor mine.

LEVI

Nor mine.

SIMEON

And yet this is not all.
Some little we could bear and wink upon:
To be the puppet of our father's age,
Keep house, the stores o'erlook, the vintages;
All nice employments (far too nice for us):
Yet, with a stretch of patience this could pass,
And he might live, and we could bear his sight:—
Not so when, thus o'ersurfeited with ease,
He takes exceptions to our wearied worth,
And sleeps to dream that we are but his slaves,
Must all bow down and kiss the earth to him;
In musing visions artfully contriv'd
That throw a glory round about himself,
Casting on us the shadow of contempt;
Poor worms that crawl about in Heaven's face
Most disobediently to plague his eye.
We are not fit for heaven or earth, forsooth,
While he 's the dainty image of the world.—
This Joseph dreams that we are slaves to him:
Our sire cries, 'Well—ah well; it must be true,
For Joseph, whom I love of all my sons,
Hath found it in his sleep.'

ISSACHAR

He feeds too well;
He is too full of blood, too sleek and fair,
Whereof these fat and oily thoughts are bred;
We'll purge them off by letting forth his blood,

And, knowing that he loves to sleep and dream,
Forget the stop, and let him bleed to death.

REUBEN [*Aside.*

What shall I do alone among these curs?
To fight against them were to lose us both;
To weep were but to play a feeble part,—
Excite their mirth, and move them to contempt;
Unless, indeed, each tear that I let fall
Would prove a knotty club (ah, that it could!).
Surely, my brothers, you are not so bad, [*Aloud.*
So bloody, so unnaturally given,
To wish to paint your envy-chasèd cheeks
In the deep crimson that sustains the life
Of him, your brother and your father's son!

ISSACHAR

You may try, Reuben: I will not be mov'd.
Your tongue 's a pipe that unto this old tune
E'en playeth by itself: we're tir'd of it,
(I marvel much that it was mute so long);
But sith we heed it not, why, let it play.

REUBEN

Oh, Issachar and brethren! Do but think
How noble, now that you have got revenge
Close in your palms, 'twould be in you to say
(Turning sweet pity to your gentle hearts),
'Our brother wrongs us; but the boy is young,
And years will teach him how to honour us
For our forbearance and superior power.
Our father, too, whose grief will bruise his heart,
Losing the flower that his eye did love,—
Shall we not think of him and spare his son?
He thought of us, and kept us in the way

Of industry, which leads to happiness;
And since but prattling children at his knees
Up to this hour, save only in this thing,
Hath shar'd his pleasure and his hopes with us;
And with that stuff with which his bosom swells,
Love and affection, hath beguiled our days;
Making our path of life both plain and smooth.
For his sake therefore we will spare his son;
For ours, that in the many years to come
We may contemn remorse, and live at peace.'

ISSACHAR

Double excitement plays upon my frame,
For, Simeon, I am famish'd with this air:
Shall we browse first on food, or on revenge?

REUBEN

Join one of you a gentle breath with mine:
You'll gain more happiness in Joseph's love
Than sullen joy in his destruction.

JUDAH

Not I, indeed: I value not his love
At the poor siftings of our granary.

SIMEON

Reuben, he doth contemn us of his birth;
For as the virtues and the evils oft
Descend from sire to son, so he doth take
A deep exception to our fellowship,
That was decreed him ere he was begot.
Rachel, the beautiful (as she was call'd),
Despis'd our mother Leah, for that she
Was tender-ey'd, lean-favour'd, and did lack
The pulpy ripeness swelling the white skin

To sleek proportions beautiful and round,
With wrinkled joints so fruitful to the eye.
All this is fair: and yet we know it true
That 'neath a pomane breast and snowy side
A heart of guile and falsehood may be hid,
As well as where the soil is deeper tinct'.—
So here with this same Rachel was it found:
The dim blue-lacèd veins on either brow,
Neath the transparent skin meandering,
That with the silvery-leavèd lily vied;
Her full dark eye, whose brightness glisten'd through
The sable lashes soft as camel-hair;
Her slanting head curv'd like the maiden moon
And hung with hair luxuriant as a vine
And blacker than a storm; her rounded ear
Turn'd like a shell upon some golden shore;
Her whispering foot that carried all her weight,
Nor left its little pressure on the sand;
Her lips as drowsy poppies, soft and red,
Gathering a dew from her escaping breath;
Her voice melodious, mellow, deep, and clear,
Lingering like sweet music in the ear;
Her neck o'ersoften'd like to unsunn'd curd;
Her tapering fingers rounded to a point;
The silken softness of her veinèd hand;
Her dimpled knuckles answering to her chin;
And teeth like honeycombs o' the wilderness:
All these did tend to a bad proof in her.—
For armèd thus in beauty she did steal
The eye of Jacob to her proper self,
Engross'd his time, and kept him by her side,
Casting on Leah indifference and neglect;
Whereat great Heaven took our mother's part
And struck young Rachel with a barrenness,

While she bore children: thus the matter went;
Till Rachel, feeling guilty of her fault,
Turn'd to some penitence, which Heaven heard;
And then she bore this Joseph, who must, and does,
Inherit towards the children all the pride
And scorn his mother had towards our mother:—
Wherefore he suffers in our just rebuke.

REUBEN [*Aside.*

So: if they date their grief from thirty years,
And slur the very beauties of the dead
To prove some cause why they may hate enough,
I may go prate unto a waterfall.
If they would change their pity for the gall
Of some wild tiger, I had better hopes
To touch their bosoms with compassion
By pitiful complaints and gentle words:
For when an evil deed is thus abroach,
The will predominant the judgement blinds;
And he who seeks to lay it with advice
Feeds and provokes it to a pride of power
Which nothing but superior power can tame.
The will doth push itself beyond itself,
And full of madness doth provoke to ire
By its own act, to fret and carve a way
To all destruction. Mercy is but a spur
To goad on faster to its red design;
And sense feeds on the senses. To tell them plain
Of what they are, advise them of their vice,
Expose themselves unto their proper eye,
Were just, and yet not wise. It were, indeed,
By casting a contempt upon themselves,
To put them furiously to hate the truth;
Seeing that Virtue never looks so ill
Unto the eye of Vice (that's sick of good)

As when it tempts it to rebuke itself,
And to respect the object of its scorn.—
'Tis here the villain doth put on his cap,
And plumes him proudly on his tyranny.
More virtue gets more passion; penitence
Sits all forlorn before the armèd will,
Contempt and malice being accessary.
So this young boy's simplicity would be
A greater mark to tempt the avenging knife
Than all the grief they boast. Bad passions are
Like a prolific poison in the blood,
And grow of their own nourishment so fast,
That all the man but lives unto the end
To which they point. Whence can the sweetness come
Of living to do vilely? For the thing
We do ourselves, in others we should scorn;
Yet in ourselves 'tis worshipp'd as a God
To whom we sacrifice. Alas! it is
A way to me most crookèd and unlearn'd.
Fear is the only thing to make them blench—
I would it thunder'd!——

SIMEON

The musing Reuben meditates some stop.

ISSACHAR

Oh, let him muse!—his most vexation is
Only a gnat unto a lion's ear:
He will not wail so loud to wake us up.

REUBEN

Ye bearded men, with nervous, sinewy limbs!—
Ye demi-giants! who from forging breasts
Toss through constrainèd nostrils splenetic winds!

Ye shepherds, and young herdsmen of the vale !—
Oh, Jacob's sons and Joseph's brethren !
Have ye no trembling ? Have ye not a fear,
Ye heartless butchers of this patient lamb,
That star-blasts will strike through you where you
are,
Or the spell'd quaking of the tremulous earth
Swallow you whole in its remorseless womb ?
Think ye those bloodied hands will not draw slant
The storm-bolt in its fury, spite of prayers ?
Oh, think, ye men condemn'd ! the hand of God
Is open, ample, merciful, and just,
And doth o'erburthen human love with good ;
But it is also valiant, great, and wise,
And with a rod of fire doth scourge those slaves
Who take the life of man, and play with blood.
Say that He spares you and He lets you live ;
Your days to come are rotten at the core :
Your memory would fear its exercise ;
Ye would hate food, for it sustain'd your lives ;
And groan in heaviness, and weep and wail,
Till you shall find some cave wherein to die,
And end a forfeit life of slothful pain.
Oh, Issachar ! my brother, is it not
Better to stop and shun the punishment,
And live to love and honour thy old age,
And find a grave out through the joys of life ?
What think'st thou ?——

ISSACHAR

Why, that my hand is stronger than thy tongue.

REUBEN

Your thoughts are like an egg, that 's hard to hatch,
Part blood and vapour, and a callous mass.

SIMEON

Our senses tire of waiting on thy tongue,
Nor are our passions in a state, I think,
For such-like music; so we neither fear
Nor love thy speech, alike indifferent,
But think thee fool, and weaker than a child
In suffering evil that thou mightest end.

ISSACHAR

A little honey will not catch our wit:
A little fear will never scare our will.

SIMEON

We will no longer linger o'er this deed.

ISSACHAR

But do it, since occasion is at hand.

REUBEN

Will you stand in the lightning when 'tis done?

ISSACHAR

Let that appear—— [*Enter* JOSEPH.
Here is the gentle youth—
Art thou not weary, Joseph, with thy walk?

SIMEON

Aye, is my brother? Will he take my stool?

ISSACHAR

Why, what brought you good heart, my merry boy,
To search us out? Surely you thought us sick
At heart to have your gracious company.

LEVI

How could our father spare you from his sight ?
I marvel he should let you travel thus
Through long and dangerous tracks ; yet at your age
I was sent forth, nor wind nor weather stood
Betwixt my labour and my journey's end.
But you're more choice, are made of rarer stuff,
Fashion'd for some great end, and should be kept
With nicest care from dangers most remote.

JUDAH

Though I embrace you not, believe me, youth,
I'm glad you are amongst us—and alone.

ZEBULUN

And so am I.

DAN

Indeed 'tis kindly done,
To tempt fatigue, leaving thy smoking meat
To dip with us and eat of our cold fare ;
It argues love and condescension rare
In one who lives so fair and lies so soft
And hath such pampering dreams of his great worth,
To visit such dull herdsmen as ourselves,
Living by common means to common ends,
Who have but hardly simple things to give,
Unworthy one so nice and choicely bred,
Who needs must scorn our single-colour'd coats.

JOSEPH

Whate'er you mean, I thank you, brethren.
Our sire commanded me to use my speed
To go and dine with him.

ISSACHAR

I thought as much.

NAPHTALI

And will you go ?—that is, will fate permit ?
Did you ne'er dream that we have leave of fate
To put his mantle on invisibly
And use his wand and power ?—In sooth, I'm glad,
Yea it delights me much to see you here.

JOSEPH

I am no judge of art ; nor can I find
Why you should use it to a boy like me :
And yet your speech of love and tenderness
Sounds hollow, faithless, and unnatural.

ISSACHAR

Ha ! Are you sure of that ? perchance you dream.
[*Strikes him.*

JOSEPH

Oh, cruel Issachar !—I will not weep.
No, though my eyes burn up, I will not weep.

ISSACHAR

A vision clouds them o'er.

SIMEON

Alas ! poor boy :
What shame and anger flush at once his cheek !
I needs must pity him ; and yet I think
This side is livid and of sadder hue,
So that it shames its fellow. [*Strikes him.*

REUBEN [*Aside.*
Hateful curs!

ZEBULUN
Oh, fie! to let this reverend youth stand thus,
No taller than our girdles. Set him up
Upon the highest stool, that he may look
More than our equal, and more like himself.
In his next commerce with his heavenly guide,
Perchance he'll throw an idle word away
Tending to favour us.

LEVI
In hopes whereof,
Being exalted thus, I bow my knee
Before thee—Prophet!

ZEBULUN
Hail, Prophet!

DAN
Hail!

NAPHTALI
All hail!

SIMEON
Here, I have gather'd thee a crown of weeds;
Thou may'st not stoop—I'll put it on thy head.

JOSEPH
Oh, mean and vicious! Oh, ye savage men!

ISSACHAR
Ho! stop his mouth—and do not let him speak.

SIMEON [*Kneels.*

Sweet image! secret chosen at God's hand,
Out of thy grace and wondrous greatness hear,
And hearing, grant a boon to one who kneels
And almost kisses thy inspirèd foot.
I pray thee let me live upon this earth,
And breathe this air and nourish me with food;
Which being granted, seeing 'tis not fit
That one so mean as I should dwell and live
Beneath the same roof with thy holiness,
Let me commend thy purity to heaven,
The proper house for one so far divine;
But, sith thou canst not enter there with life,
I will commit the act of love I owe,
And fit thee for thy journey.

DAN

How he holds
His stubborn courage swelling in his eye!

LEVI

Now would he surely brain us if he could.

JUDAH

See what a store of gall he has reserv'd
To sauce his pride when he should come to power.

ZEBULUN

He bandies scorn for scorn.

DAN

We were all dead,
Did but his inspiration serve him.

NAPHTALI

Slave!

LEVI

A minion—a vicious minion!

JUDAH

Ho! spoil his pretty coat.

ZEBULUN

You dreamer!

JUDAH

Boy!

ZEBULUN

Call down your deity.—Where is your deity?

JUDAH

Impudent boy!

DAN

Presumptuous!

LEVI

Disdainful!

NAPHTALI

Proud to thy brethren!

ISSACHAR

No more—down with him!

JOSEPH

Great God! Ye will not murder me?

ISSACHAR

Oh, no!

Ask our clubs.

SIMEON

Strike him down!

REUBEN

Hold! Hold! Hold!

SIMEON

Keep Reuben back, or down with him as well.

LEVI

Let loose the dogs on him.

ISSACHAR

Be warn'd—be warn'd.

REUBEN

Dear Issachar! one word—Sweet Simeon! but one—
If I exceed a minute in my speech
Knock out my brains—let me have that, I pray.—
I see when men are bent on shedding blood, [*Aside.*
Like a vast engine that hath many works
Turn'd by a master-wheel, they're forc'd to wrench
And chafe their courage to the highest pitch.
There 's a prelusive pause that harbours fear
About this yeasty working to the act—
A sort of let that shuns its premises;
And so that they could wipe the stain away
They would be glad to find the object gone,
The breast reliev'd from its prodigious freight,

And no blood sticking on them. How is this—
The cause, my brain, and the preventive means ?—
Quick—quick.—The will is but a coward at heart ;—
(Unless 'tis deaf and savage like a beast's,
Where conscience wakes the will sins on its knees)
—And lack of reason upon nature acting
Doth force a courage that is bold and false,
That gathers resolution in the dark,
Like a blind giant hungry for revenge.
Teach but the will a way to act in full
Upon the object without shedding blood,
And reason then looks in on prejudice ;
And reason will not let man murder man.
Why, then, the coward shows himself, and puts
The secret knife into its sheath again ;
Great Conscience is task-master to the will,
And lets it forth as men hold bears in chains
To have them back, and whip them at the fault
They would not care if he were snatch'd to heaven,
And send no envy after.

ISSACHAR

Come, Reuben, waste thy speech.

SIMEON

And be not tedious.

REUBEN

My brethren, you mistake : I do not plead
For Joseph's life : I have no such intent.
Your general judgement and your stronger power
Teach me much greater wisdom. This I say :
It were a pity to shed Joseph's blood,
And put the crimson stain upon your hands,

When you have easier and safer means
To work your will on him and cause his death.
Close on the borders of the wilderness
There yawns a dangerous and delvèd pit,
From which no man alive can make escape,
Being deep, and dark, and hollow on all sides:
Now, since you seem to think the boy deserves
At all your hands a fatal punishment,
Suppose you cast him down into this hole,
And let him perish; then chance and time must share
With you what blame there may be in the act;
For hunger kills him in this case, not you.

ISSACHAR

What say you, Simeon?

SIMEON

It is a tempting pit.
I know it well—a panther lay there late—
A very tempting pit!

REUBEN

In your old age, when this fierce fire 's burnt out,
And its charr'd ashes scatter'd to the winds,
Your memory will breathe unstain'd with blood.

ISSACHAR

Then be it so.

SIMEON

He will have time to pray,
And sleep, and dream, and hear beasts howl, and think
On the spic'd mess at home.

LEVI

I wish you joy
Of your good fortune since you rose this morn.

DAN

Comfort go with you.

NAPHTALI

Amen, say I.

JOSEPH

Oh! Issachar!—

ISSACHAR

Be silent!—Stop his tongue—away with him.
[*Exeunt* SIMEON, ZEBULUN, *and* NAPHTALI, *bearing* JOSEPH *out.*

REUBEN [*Aside.*

Thank Heaven this goes well: if my design
Hold out as firmly as it has begun,
I shall have purchas'd hatred of these men,
Have sav'd my brother for our father's arms,
And spar'd him all that heavy weight of grief
That needs must hang about his Joseph's grave.
God's hand be with me still! [*Exit.*

ISSACHAR

Come, let us spread the cloth and eat of bread:
Fetch the dried figs and grapes, cast the sharp seeds
From peel'd pomegranates ripe and red as fire,
To ease our chaf'd blood. Appetite's in the air.

DAN

Let us be glad and light of heart to-day;
Our enemy hath failèd in his craft,

And we at length are righted of our wrongs.—
Who kills the kid?

LEVI

That shall be Judah's care,
While I go gather wood to make a fire.

JUDAH

Listen, give ear! I thought I heard a bell,
And now again 'tis drifted with the air
That hurries from the east.

DAN

What fragrance sweet
Doth slumber on the bosom of the wind
As it heaves westward! Subtle and fresh it is,
As rich as flowers, and less sickly too,
Like ointment on an altar that is forc'd
By sacrificing fire, and fit for Heaven
To stoop and breathe upon.

JUDAH

The angels' hair
(My father told me when I was a child)
Is hung with dew much like the seedy pearls,
And of an essence rarer than the sweets
That the winds gather in high summer's tide;
Surely one such invisibly hath pass'd
And shook his dripping feathers o'er our heads;
For nothing else could taste so fine as this.—

DAN

Yonder's a storm of dust. What cattle, now—
What herdsmen may these be? Strangers are
come;

And this fine perfume that doth greet us hath
Escap'd from spice and aromatic gums,
Their precious freight from isles afar remote,—
The herald of their progress, for it still
Flies on before. Lo! from this bank I see
Swarthy Egyptians, yellow as their gold,
Tracking their way along the mountain's side
Riding on mules; and like the fleeting cloud
Their mantles hang about them loose and free;
While overhead a round of plaited cane
Is held to intercept the burning sun;
And the grey dogs, lolling their bleachèd tongues,
Slink 'neath the caravans, with travel griev'd.
Their camels all have bells about their necks,
Making a merry music as they go,
Slow-footing 'neath a weight of packages,
That, nicely rais'd, like to square towers show.
The dromedaries seem to sleep and walk,
And move, as they could creep on thus for ever.
Harness'd they are to waggons made of cane
(The light receptacle of rarities
To grace the palace of some foreign king)
Upon low wheels, bestain'd of either soil,
Lightly sustain'd, secure from overthrow,
Their lighter cargo so dispos'd with art
To gather power from the propelling wind.

LEVI

And bear they down this way?

DAN

To our very tent!

ISSACHAR

They must be merchants travelling from the east

That turn their goods to profitable coin,
And wander thus to cities far away,
Seeking to raise their fortunes on the wants,
Or else desires, of wealthy citizens.

DAN

Albeit 'tis a rich life, though dangerous.

LEVI

That 's not the best nor worst. Is it not brave
To see strange people, join with many men
Of many countries, lodge in wallèd cities,
And mix in throngs and gather'd companies;
See their rejoicings, customs, state, and laws,
Their craftsmen, mode of labour, and affairs;
To hear their singing and their minstrelsy;
To please the eye with habits of bright hue,
With sports, and shows, and public sacrifice,
Relics of ancient days, and men-at-arms,
And priests, and officers of high degree,
And to behold a king? This is somewhat;
More when the profit of the journey pays
Your liberty and living in the land,
And sends you home more gilded with their gold
Than is the bee from rifling the sunflower.
And yet, again, in all these journeyings
They dodge about between fell Danger's legs,
Who many times steps over them, and puts
His foot so near them that they shake with it.—
E'en in their safety they have grievances;
As, risk belonging to commodity;
And storms, and weariness, and toilsome ways,
And choking dust, and dull monotonies,
And scarcity of rivers and of springs
Wherein they perish of a feverish death,

Bar'd to the elements, and fretted sore
By ever sickening for the journey's end,
Or ere it is begun. Trust me, indeed,
I'd rather be a herdsman in this vale
Than take the evil with the novelty.

ISSACHAR

I cannot say I would.

JUDAH

A good thought this.—
Were it not better that these men should take
Our brother Joseph, sold into their hands,
And leave him bondman in some distant land?
Then do we 'scape at once his blood and death
(Which surely will rebuke us, being his flesh),
And he may take what fortune he may find.
Living so far from us, he is as dead,
And we are freed from his detested sight
Close as a grave could do it.

ISSACHAR

It is well.

DAN

It is a tempting chance to have him hence,
And saves the crime.

LEVI

But let us keep his coat,
That we may dip it in a he-goat's blood,
And shock our father's eye with the belief
That we have found it, and the boy is dead
Of savage beasts.

ISSACHAR

Go to our brethren straight:
Say I entreat them to bring Joseph back:
And let them have full word of what we do.
[*Exeunt* LEVI *and* JUDAH.

Enter certain Ishmaelites.

ISSACHAR

Stand there, ho! merchants.

FIRST ISHMAELITE

Strangers, what with us?

ISSACHAR

Whence do ye come, and whither are ye bound?

FIRST ISHMAELITE

From Egypt we have been to Gilead
To gather dates and precious frankincense,
Pink cinnamon, and myrrh, and spicery,
And chests of fragrant medicinal balm
To work cool ointments for the grievèd flesh,
And lull the pain of evils and of wounds;
And now to Egypt go we back again
To profit of our toil. Such rarities
Are precious in old cities, and are priz'd
At sundry wedges of the purest gold,
That intercept us ere we reach the mart.

Enter SIMEON, LEVI, JUDAH, ZEBULUN, *and* NAPHTALI, *with* JOSEPH.

SIMEON

The boy has felt the bottom of the pit,
But we drew for him, and have brought him here.

JUDAH

Come, will you purchase at our hands a slave?
Of early youth, both fair and straight of limb,
Having alone a blemish of the mind,
A tow'ring spirit full of high disdain.

SECOND ISHMAELITE

That is a fault.—Great spirit in a slave
Threatens a sleeping master. Egyptian whips
May mend this vice in him.

ISSACHAR

Look on him here.
The pith that gathers in his youthful bones
In riper years will bear a burden well.

LEVI

First take his outer skin, his gaudy coat,
Which we may want to mind us of his loss,
And soak the tears up we shall shed for him.

FIRST ISHMAELITE

I like him well. What barter wilt thou make?

ISSACHAR

At how many pieces do you value him?

First Ishmaelite

Will you not rather take some woven cloth,
Purple, or scarlet bright; or bonnets trimm'd
With fringe of green that veileth off the sun!
I have some arms and implements of war
Well fitting to a nervous grasp like yours;
And ropes of pearls that sleep in bleachèd wool,
And native jewels fast in lavender
In a close cedar box of curious scent,
And work'd with our Egyptian mysteries.
Will you this charmèd staff, some spices rich
To steep your broth in fragrance, and endue
Your palate's moisture with high-season'd meats?
Or here are garments of the camel's hair,
The hides of bears, and various skins of beasts;
And broad Egyptian hats with eagle plumes;
Lances, and spears, and huntsman's garniture.

Simeon

These dry Egyptians are like all the rest.
Strangers or not, man paints commodity
As though he lov'd to give its virtues up;
Dazzling your fancy with a gay report
Till you shall die of longing all this while.
'Tis but a shift to keep the money back,
And save it in the pouch. Gold is the thing:
Get much of that, and you may pick your way
Over the crouching world: this tawny key
Can open wide the secrets of all hearts,
And nature wears a universal smile;
A hundred slaves with all their hundred wills
Are but mute shadows following your eye.
Gold is the ribs of power.

FIRST ISHMAELITE

Why, there it is! It is man's other self,
With that in hand I lead a charmèd life;
Without it I may starve upon my wits.
Did'st say thou would'st have coin?

JUDAH

Aye, merchant, aye.
The goods you give us would have each a tongue
To tell a secret that must not be known.

FIRST ISHMAELITE

Say fifteen pieces, if it must be so.

SIMEON

Go to—you 'bate us, man; you are too hard.

FIRST ISHMAELITE

Sooth, it is square and just.

SIMEON

No, merchant, no.
The service of a fair and proper youth
Just in the flowery opening of the bud,
Would weigh against thy silver o'er again
In the school'd eye of some rich husbandman.
Remember that you purchase his whole life,
To bear your burthens e'en when grey and old.

SECOND ISHMAELITE

The city swarms with slaves, and men of bone
Barely exist by sweating through the day;
Save for the daily beauty in his mien,
I would not meddle in't. Say twenty, then.

SIMEON

Well, come and count them out upon this stone;
And take him off to serve thy countrymen.

SECOND ISHMAELITE

These are true pieces bearing Pharaoh's mark.

SIMEON

So—Now we are quit. Away—speed well, and thrive.

JOSEPH

O Simeon!
Into thy bosom I will run for help.
I am thy brother; hate me ne'er so much,
But do not cast me forth to death and shame.
We may yet live blessing and to be bless'd.

SIMEON

Thy tongue has lost its charm.—Away—away!

JOSEPH

O Issachar!
A trembling boy is shaken to thy foot,
E'en from the branch where he did cling for help.
Have pity on me: think when thou wert young
How 'twould have wrung thy heart to have been torn
From thy dear father and thy brethren,
And given to strange masters of strange tents.
A little while, and I was yet a child,
And many a time have sat upon thy knee;
And many a time have kiss'd thy gentle cheek.
Thy name too was the first I learn'd to lisp;
Canst thou forget these things, and do me scathe?

Do not strive with me that I touch thy cloak:
There is no poison in these childish hands;
I will embrace thy knees. Now we are like
To part, I feel how much I love thee, Issachar.

ISSACHAR

Would'st creep into my bosom through my ears;
Let go my knees. Ah! snake—let go, I say;
What, wilt thou brag of power till the last?
[*Strikes him down.*

JOSEPH

Unhand me, Midianites, and let me go!
Those shrivell'd hands shall never bind these arms.
If it is profit that you seek in me,
My father for my ransom will give more,
Yea, twenty times, than any stranger will
For my poor services: merchants, you err;
(Oh! you have sorely hurt me, Issachar!)
My brothers do but jest with you in this.
Behold, they are seven men; dost thou believe
In all their seven hearts there is no drop
Of pity? Observe each manly countenance
Work'd by the ruling hand of God divine;
And say, are they not maps of dignity
Brimm'd with high feeling, full of love as power;
Are not their bosoms quick, and therefore touch'd
With sweet affection for their fellow men?
Had I the inches I would punish you,
Daring to credit (though it doth appear)
That they are cruel and unnatural,
A sample of vile practice to all tribes.
This is not so, they are my brethren all;
I love them dearly e'en from first to last;
I have offended them, at which I grieve,

And this my fright is meant my punishment:
It is no more, I do believe it is;
Pray you think better of us, Canaanites.

SIMEON

You tardy merchants take him on with you;
We have no more of idle time to waste.

ISSACHAR

We have your silver; either bear him off,
Or we will take him to our wrath again.

ISHMAELITE

Nay, I must have the profit of my coin.

JOSEPH

Oh, deaf to mercy! Oh, ye hard, hard hearts!
Nothing more cruel can you add to this.
Oh, spirit of my father, fill my pride!
Spirit of God, descend unto my heart!
I will not grieve, I will not sue to stay,
So that your power never shall rejoice.
Behold, I smile. Oh, Egypt! yea, oh, world!
In thy vast bosom will I seek for love.
However bitter, and how hard my fate,
Still I gain something which is comforting,
For I do leave more hatred, malice, wrath,
Amongst these brothers (which augments my shame)
Than ever I can find at strangers' hands.
Listen, ye men, how firm a voice I have,
'Commend me to our venerated sire.'
Forgive me, merchants, that I spoke you ill,
I am right proud to keep you company.
(Surely my heart will burst.——) [*Aside.*

[*Exeunt* Ishmaelites *with* JOSEPH.

Scene IV.—*A Pit in the Wilderness.*

Enter Reuben.

Reuben

Oh! I rejoice so much I cannot call.
I see that dangerous evils are more kind
Than our own brothers; for this treacherous gap,
Form'd to betray men's footing, and to drown
Their fearful clamours in its cavèd womb,
Hath yet more tenderness to this young boy,
Now shelter'd in its dark and hideous breast,
Than in his brothers' hollow bosoms dwell,
With hearts of stone and pitiless revenge.—
What, ho! I say—Arise! and cheer thee up.
I come to rifle thee from Danger's arms,
Pale, and alarm'd; to give the warm embrace,
And sun thee in thy father Jacob's love,
Where thou shalt flourish with a holy truth
That hatred cannot blemish.—Arise! I say—
So thou may'st smile on my affrighted love
That fruitfully did mourn for thee, like one
Who diggeth his own grave. But thou shalt live.
Thy crafty brothers have o'er-reach'd themselves;
And with a bosom full of zeal I come
To snatch thee quick from out this hollow tomb.—
What, ho! there—answer, ho!—All still as death.
Ah! surely they have stunn'd him with the fall:
But chafing him with bruisèd weeds and balm
Will mend that evil and restore the sense.—
The depth is cruel! If he should be slain,
Take dreadful vengeance on their act, oh God!

Drop burning fire upon their guilty heads.—
And yet, methinks he cannot be much hurt;
A fall like this would never kill a man,
Unless deserted specially of Heaven.
A treacherous silence that doth freeze my blood
Makes answer to the echo of my voice!—
How could they injure such a gentle youth,
So soft of speech, so wooing in his ways,
So wise and holy, and with such a mien,
That, did the angels teach men exercise,
They could add nothing, or of mood or grace,
To that which nature has bestow'd on him?
Yet mothers say with a prophetic nod
They mostly lose these rarer jewels first.
If thou dost live, oh, speak! or make some noise—
What, ho! there—ho!— [*He descends by a rope.*

Scene V.—*A Vale at Dothan.*

Simeon, Issachar, Judah, &c. *sharing money.*

Judah

Yonder comes Reuben: hide the silver up,
And let us keep the secret to ourselves.

Enter Reuben.

Reuben

My gentle brothers, have you seen the boy
Since you did cast him down into the pit?—
I pray you tell me; come, be plain and fair.

ISSACHAR

What would you know ? We did desist our course
And turn our justice round at your request ;
Still you would govern us in this affair,
And still you are displeas'd.

REUBEN

You have not seen him, then ?

SIMEON

No.

JUDAH

How should we ?

REUBEN

May the first thunderbolt that spurns the hand
Of the avenging archer of the clouds
Sink in amongst you ! And I would that now
A deafening storm from either corner raging
Made havoc o'er your heads !

SIMEON

What—what is this ?

REUBEN

Oh, ye detested slaves ! ye murderers !—
Blood—blood, ye dogs ! that is your precious food—
Nought less than the deep current of man's life
Can hiss your passions cool. Do you not fear
Lest you should grow proficient in your trade,
And murder men till men are scarce on earth,
That Heaven will cramp you with some sudden death ?

ISSACHAR

Madman!

REUBEN

You are a villain, Issachar!
Aye, raise your clubs and tarr your angry dogs;
For dogs or devils I will never budge
Till I have eas'd the spirit of my grief
By telling you with curses what ye are.—
Nay, Simeon, flourish not your threatening staff:
You are too mean for fear. I defy all.
Oh! had I got you in a narrow pass,
So that a single coward at a time
Might use his wrath against my careless life,
I'd bring you low past kneeling.—Child-killers!
I do so hate you that I have a mind
To strike thee, Issachar, unto my foot.
Bustle, and shift your stands—I will be heard:
And he that stirs a foot, or moves his staff,
Though but to wave it doubtful of offence,
I'll mar his manhood with so sure a blow
As deadly dealt as is the eye of fate,
And dangerously scuffle with the odds.
A giant well may fear a desperate man:
And ye do look so mean and impotent
That I should scorn myself for shunning you.

ISSACHAR

I ne'er was brav'd before.

REUBEN

That he who strives to justify his act
Shall die upon the spot, I say aloud;
You are all villains, all.—Who answers, ho!

SIMEON

He dares and threats!

REUBEN

Listen, ye kites! and hear yourselves proclaim'd.
The greatest of all villains is that man
Who doth debauch him in the greatest crime.
Mean theft and slander and ill-will are bad,
But they are virtues when compar'd with one
Which none but the gross villain doth commit—
'Tis callèd murder, and its act is this:—
By banishing all honour from its thought
(Pity turn'd forth to wander in the blast),
A heart as absent in the love of truth
As a cold stone within an iron chest,
It doth become so savage and deprav'd
That with a violent and wilful hand
The sleeping and the helpless it destroys,
But as all villanies do boast a head,
A measur'd standard of enormity,
So murder has, which still seems white and clear
Beside the fratricide's inhuman act.
'Tis treating Heaven with a high contempt,
Who made man for its end, not for man's wrath;
'Tis touching Heaven with a cruel thought
To cast its love back into its own face;
Therefore you are a breed of abject slaves,
A team of villains, guilty of man's blood;
Hated of Heaven and to be shunn'd on earth.
Your names are curses, which henceforth I'll use
To vilify my thoughts.

JUDAH

Why, how is this?
Young Joseph is not dead, but cast alive

Into the pit, which you yourself propos'd ;
For all I guess, he 's breathing at this hour.

REUBEN

Ah ! where ?—Ah ! where ?—For I have sought
for him :
The pit is empty, and he is destroy'd
By some fell danger ; helpless, and alone.

ISSACHAR

Why, then, chance had a hand in his decease :
And as you told us when you urg'd the thing,
Then chance is guilty of his death, not we.

REUBEN

I woo'd you with a lie, which you believ'd
Knowing it was a lie ; and, like a knave,
Sweeten'd your shaken passion to content.
You are not wont to give your senses up
At any beck of mine : why did you then ?
Only to compromise your villany !
You wish'd his death, however it has come ;
And through your means it is that he is dead—
Wherefore you're written down a murderer.

SIMEON

And all this railing will not mend it now :
What we have done, is done, and there 's an end.

REUBEN

Ye callous brood !—Oh ! never pray again,
Nor cast your faces to the open heaven ;
But stoop your bestial heads prone to the earth !
Clearness of seasons freshening our delights
Be to your senses but as marshy fogs !

The finer air to you be thick and damp!
Veil thee, oh! sun, and temper not the winds,
When they come charg'd with pestilence and plague,
So they may strike them with their baneful breath,
For they have forfeited at Nature's hands
Partition in her bounty and her love;
Therefore their spirits being thus reprov'd,
Having offended Nature's gentleness,
Shall die of comfortless and sad disease,
And rot upon themselves.

ISSACHAR

Oh! this is well.

REUBEN

Take from their food, oh, God! all wholesome taste,
Which Thou hast sent to nourish generous man;
That they may loathe to keep a life on foot
Sustain'd with such monotonous distaste
And the deep relish of the wine they drink,
Oh! flavour with their fault: then it will force
The sense to ache, and curl upon the lip
Worse than when poison, or a cup of balm
Wherein a speckled viper hath been steep'd,
Meets both the gorge and eye.—Whene'er they sleep
Clothe them with heaviness and with mad dreams,
And fill their fancy full of objects dire,
Hanging their hair with agonizing drops
Of retributive horror and remorse;
For they most carelessly have put away
All claim upon Thy mercy bountiful,
And for a little passion barterèd

Their title to Thy most paternal love.—
May they never laugh again !—

SIMEON

All this is vain !

REUBEN

Blight all their fortunes, and destroy their peace !—
A murrain be upon their cattle's lives,
Wether and lamb, that gather'd vultures may
Make house about their tents and in their sheds,
Gorging their food with eager discontent
While they shall sink and famish on the taint.—
Where'er their plough furrows the embrownèd slope
So rich and fruitful in its idleness,
Or dibble drills the pregnant-moulded earth,
Come wombless barrenness ; and all the seed
They shower in the promise of the spring,
By harvest time turn to as many stones ;
So may they never shear the curlèd wool,
Nor give a heifer for a sacrifice—
So that they never may enrich the eye
And scan the sober beauty of the corn ;
Where on that golden carpet roll'd around,
Walks mother Autumn on the rosy eves
Coming to worship Summer ere she fades,
And see her fiery clouds and mellow leaves
And fruits luxurious yielding from the stalk,
And taste of the blown fragrance of the air ;
And mount her throne of beautiful decay
O'erhung with flowers sicken'd of the sun,
Where she expires on Winter's icy hand !—
May all their labour an abortion prove,
And all their hopes sit brooding o'er their graves !—
So they may never smile in the green fields,

Sweetening their spirits at the combing hay;
Nor grieve when mute and perpendicular
Dispungings of the hollow-bosom'd clouds
Gutter the fruitful surface of the earth:
Nor joy when Temperance with silver wings
Sits pluming her bright feathers in the sky,
And eagles brood upon the thwarted oaks,
And larks and thrushes with deep, mellow throats
Rejoicing in the splendour of the scene
Make wanton in the echoes of the vale—
Oh! never may the jocund harvest bell
(Inspiring all the spirits of our tribe)
Ring its sweet battery unto their ears,
Tuning the anthem voluble and loud,
Sacred to plenty for the garners full—
So they may wander with a doleful step,
In sullen sadness twin to heavy pain
Plucking a leaf of myrtle or of bay,
Not for the cap, but to tread under foot.—
Thus let them crave!—Bondsmen at strangers' stalls,
Where choking be their hire!—

JUDAH

This is enough.

REUBEN

Oh, God! turn mercy to Thy angel's hands!—
Young Joseph was not pitied in the storm,
Therefore no mercy yield!—

DAN

We can bear more.

REUBEN

The angel's fatal trumpet did announce,
Judging the highest vengeance to be wreck'd

On the chief criminal in God's reproof.—
Down with it on these brothers' guilty heads!

ISSACHAR

Give him his way.

SIMEON

Aye, let him take his round.

REUBEN

Be still, my sincere heart!—Oh! give me peace!—
Anger and tears contend within my throat
Like fire and water in contention mix'd;
And passion smoulders in my very heart.
Oh! I could weep that Joseph is no more
Till marble should be furrow'd with my tears—
Oh! I could rave on your enormities
Till words were wanting me to name ye plagues,
Then like the forlorn image of despair
Sit dumb and think past words.—My passion cries
for blood!

ISSACHAR

It is a madman's.

REUBEN

Oh! ye kites!

NAPHTALI

What good
Can come of this?

REUBEN

No good can ever come
Within the limits of thy crimson sphere.
Thou'st sorely wounded good, and therefore good

Will tremble in thy presence like a flower
That 's ruffian'd by the blast.—Thou'rt shunable :
And good will rather perish from the earth
Than lay its perfect and congenial hand
Upon thy unbless'd head.

JUDAH

I have a fear
He will betray us to our father's wrath.

REUBEN

Hast thou a fear ? Thou wert a better man
Ere thou had'st work'd a cause to fear thy friends.

SIMEON

I fear his folly too.

REUBEN

Banish it then.
If 'twere a spotted leprosy, 'twere thine
Even to rotting. But since your foul disgrace
Like to a canker-worm would gnaw the heart
With shame and anguish of your reverend sire,
I'll keep the fiery secret to myself,
And leave your icy bosoms to promulge
Some subtle lie, which forg'd to his belief
Will raise a cunning ladder to his heart,
While he shall thank your griefs.—Oh ! perfect slaves !

JUDAH

This is the best.

REUBEN

Why, do I not say so ?
And does not my device hug your desire ?

Yet for this stead you are so far beholden,
That I must ask a boon as some return.
Tell me, I pray you, whence comes your content,
Like a cold fountain through a pool of stone ?
For I am sick to drink of such a stream.
What shall I do, and whither shall I go,
To ease my pain, and shun my father's face ?
What well were deep enough to hold my grief ?
What secret place would hide my anguish up ?—
You who have help'd me to this hard estate,
Oh ! help me to some comfort. The poor boy
(Whom I shall never more hear speak again)
Lies mutely shrouded in my weeping mind,
With all his innocent look. Old Jacob, too,
Sobs at the sight and groaneth in my ear,
And wrings his hands, and ravisheth his beard,
And takes no relish in his faltering prayers.—
Oh ! give me back my peace, ye envious men !
And gather up the thorns that ye have cast
Upslanting in my path of life to come.—
I am consum'd with passion, and but fool
My graver senses that should be my guides—
I have nowhere to go !— [*Exit.*

LEVI

Is this the May-born Reuben, whose low song
Ever beguil'd his hearers of some tears ?—
Is this the gentle brother of our band,
The minstrel of all revels and all hymns,
The first to pity and the last to rave ?
I never knew the compass of his voice,
Nor ever saw the fire of his eye,
Until this hour : nor such a swoln display
Of words and actions ever did I find
In any other man.

ZEBULUN

I am amaz'd!

ISSACHAR

I had a mind to beat him to the ground.

SIMEON

A man may hide the dragon in his mind
For twenty years in torpid solitude,
Like to an earthquake 'neath a flowery plain;
But when commotion (bred of some rough cause)
Plays on the secret spring of his command,
Then the great giant passion rears his arms,
And wakes to know himself. Like the milch cow
Whose cub is ravin'd by the nightly wolf,
This Reuben runneth lowing up and down
Devoid of reason, blatant at the moon,
With all his instinct in extremity.

LEVI

The hand of Nature swayeth in these things,
And Reuben answers her in her design.
He is a man who loves his injuries;
Patience and meekness are his qualities.—
With such, their love is long and deep in growth
(Like to the rooted spurs of some fair pine
That spreads its beauties by the river's side);
But when the storm is up, all meekness then
Doth lose its privilege, while judgement faints
And patience curdles into feasèd wrath.
They have no force to place against the force,
No temperance stretching into fortitude;
But bind their hands unto their very grief:
Thus all their gentleness is set on fire,

Frighting its boasted guides of many years,
And madness triumphs in the overthrow.
There is no man so dangerous as he
Whose desperation doth contemn his fear;
Except it be the cunning or the wise.

DAN

Nay, waste no time in scanning his reproof:
We are the gainers, his the loss alone.

NAPHTALI

One way we are reveng'd; his grief is vain,
For that the boy still lives upon the earth.

JUDAH

And all those curses he hath shed on us
Are blown to waste.

ISSACHAR

Why, let him go and mystify his days
With an ideal sorrow of the mind,—
His folly thus begets his punishment.

SIMEON

And his loud anger woundeth but himself.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE VI.—*Jacob's Tent.*

Enter to JACOB, REUBEN, LEVI, ZEBULUN, SIMEON, ISSACHAR, JUDAH, NAPHTALI, *and* DAN.

JACOB

Smile, smile, my Reuben, I am glad at heart.—
Levi, and Zebulun, my boys, good eve.—

My curlèd Simeon, and Issachar
With overwhelming brow, it is well done.—
Let me embrace thee, Gad, and Naphtali :—
'Twas kindly meant, my sons, to keep my boy,
My merry Joseph, with you in the vale.—
Trust me I love ye for't, and sent him forth
That he might court your anger to this pass.
How like you this same Dothan ? Well, I trow.—
Ah ! God is open-handed unto us !
Wherefore a grateful sacrifice we'll make
And offer with to-morrow's rising sun.
My gentle boys, I am so full of joy,
Finding your envy melted into love,
That I disdain my staff, and smile at age.
I us'd hard words and was a little mov'd
When last we parted : let it be forgot ;
I ach'd to do it.—Where is Joseph now ?

ISSACHAR

I cannot guess !

JACOB

Why, he was still the first
To run into my arms and clasp my knees.—
Ah ! 'tis some merry sleight : you did expect
To find me thus in joy, and therefore have
Kept him without to work upon my love.
What, Joseph, there ! Thy sire is undeceiv'd.
Is it not true ?—I pray you call him in.

SIMEON

I would that he might hear.

JACOB

No more, no more.
For surely I did send him to the vale

Commanding his return, but sith he stay'd
You must have kept him in your company;
For nothing less than proffer'd love of yours
Would tempt his disobedience to my will.
You see, good youths, I cannot be deceiv'd.—
Oh! therefore call him forth. My joyful mood
Absorbs the very dullness of my age:—
Let us be glad this eve, rejoice and feast,
Mellow our spirits with a frugal hand
In generous wine.—No Joseph yet?

SIMEON

Oh, sir!
I fear to check your spirit with a truth
That being heard would bring you to a crutch,
And turn your tears of joy to tears of blood.

JACOB

Simeon, beware! you play upon my heart
It is a fragile instrument and old,
And hath been tun'd with love for many years
To thee and to thy brethren—so beware:
The strings are weak and yielding to the strain,—
A little cracks them. You do push your jest
Beyond a seemly feeling; yet I'm not
Or mov'd, or anger'd, seeing it is sport
Intended only to alarm my fear
And force my joy more perfect.

REUBEN [*Aside.*

How is this?—
Do our own virtues prove our traitors too?
Goodness invisibly beguiles a man,
And while the danger rocketh o'er his head
Enticeth him to play with faith and hope,

Already swallow'd in destruction's womb.
Thus Jacob fondleth with his misery
In promise of his joy, and is betray'd
E'en by the very purpose of his mind.
He holds himself as blind unto the truth
As if he knew and fear'd it.—Alas! I do,
For he is old and shaken.

JACOB

Will no one speak?—A cruel silence this.
Oh! take some pity of my weary age,
Nor let me die betwixt my hopes and fears.
Some evil hath been busy with my boy,
And sad foreboding in mysterious gloom
Creeps o'er my vital warmth.—Reuben shuns me,
And Judah weeps aloud.—Will no one speak?

ISSACHAR

Oh! would my tongue had never known its use,
Or else had lost its office ere this hour!

REUBEN

I would it had. [*Aside.*

ISSACHAR

For in my thought dumbness is virtuous
When speech must utter such a dismal tale.

JACOB

Ah! Issachar, your wintry breath doth rob
The current of my blood of that scant warmth
Which age requires for sustaining life.
The prelude of your speech grieves me so sore
And makes me tremble for the rest to come,
Like a poor prisoner waiting for his doom,

While the cold judge pronounces life or death.
But if it be, I run before my fate,
And my poor boy is wounded by some chance,
Nursing and watchfulness would bring him well:
And I am old and only fit to nurse,
And could be vigilant in such a case.
Thy love for me doth make thee dread the worst:
I pray thee entertain a cheerfulness.
All evils have some remedy, we know;
This is not very great—it cannot be.

SIMEON

You cheat yourself, and tease your malady;
Seeking yet shunning what you fain would know.
Now call your hidden fortitude around,
Arouse your courage, govern your despair;
And with a bravery fortify your ears,
That what I utter may not burn the sense,
Nor sear you to the brain.

JACOB

Hold!—Mercy, pray!—
Oh! gentle Simeon, if thou would'st be lov'd
Or dearly honour'd in thy life to come—
If thou would'st have thy children dutiful,
Slay not thy father. Speak thou, Issachar.

ISSACHAR

Alas! dread sire, I know not what to do.
The story I must tell is all too sad,
And you have cursèd the proclaiming tongue.
We that do know the act, did not the act,
And therefore have not earnèd thy rebuke.

REUBEN [*Aside.*

Oh! nature, nature; heavy, grievous hour!

JACOB

Whatever is to come, one thing I know—
You do not feel for Joseph or your sire
As you should do in filial duty bound;
Else you would be too full of grief yourselves
To scan my wild replies. The weight is yours;
And having tied me to my reason fast,
Come, cast it on—down with't upon my head;
And, though it sink me, yet still pile it on.—
Yet I am not so weak, but, like myself,
Or like a mount I'll over-brow thy words,
And view their fall in the abyss below
While I am rear'd triumphant. I will not
Betray my manhood to a secret tale,
Nor shake at words of thine. I do demand
To have the inmost knowledge of this thing.—
Oh! say the truth—yet say not he is dead.

ISSACHAR

The boy of all my brothers you so lov'd,
Who slumber'd in your best affections,
And was the star of all your rare delights,
O'ershadowing me, with all your other sons,—
Your Joseph, whose deserts did win that place,
The highest and most worth to be enjoy'd,
And fill it to your measureless content—
Who did forgive us all our envious guile,
Was blind unto our faults, and rose the higher
In your discerning mind, for that he ask'd
For our forgiveness when you pleas'd to frown—
Even he is surely dead.

JACOB

You see I'm firm:—
Though somewhat old, yet I can bear a rub.

SIMEON

There is no hope but what he says is true.
Look on this garment spotted with the blood
Of Joseph. We did find it by the way. [JACOB *falls.*

LEVI

You were too sudden in the showing it.

ISSACHAR

He only faints. Quick! let us bear him up.

REUBEN

Stand off, I say.—This is a pretty pass—
To bring your father swooning at your feet,
About a murder, too. This is well done.

ISSACHAR

You shall not shame us, Reuben, though you try.

REUBEN

You're sunk past shame into a deep contempt.
I will not answer thee, thou man of stone.

JUDAH

Nay, Reuben, let us raise him from the earth,
And smother not your wisdom in rebukes.

REUBEN

'Tis better as it is. His pulse still beats,
Though with a motion dangerously at ebb:
If you do raise him, you but stop the flow
That his prostration sanctions: therefore, let be.—
What eyes but yours could bear a sight like this,
And not be blasted by the glowing brand

Of physical remorse, that fears to look
Behind, chain'd fast to what it loathes? And yet,
Half devil and half angel as it is—
Or rather angel in a ruin'd house—
I would entreat you all to lose no time,
But entertain the purifying guest
Who teaches us to hate our infamy:
For though its strong hand governeth a whip,
From the right arms of murderers' sinews wrought,
The other tilteth o'er a cup of balm,
That, coolly soothing, floweth through the wounds
As fast as they are struck. The callous slave,
Untouch'd with Heaven's mercy at his crimes,
Is but a counterfeit (no man of flesh),
Having a human impress, being as dead
As the dull earth of which he first was form'd.

ISSACHAR

When I do know that I have done a thing
Deserving of remorse, I will repent.
Our brother did usurp our privilege,
And practise on our quiet and estate;
And therefore we have put him on one side,
Into that place which he has fairly earn'd.
He marr'd our peace, being but one to twelve:
Wherefore our justice hath been square with him.

REUBEN

See how his eyes do flood with teeming tears,
His grief on nature acting past his sense,
And struck beyond all joy in days to come:
Foredoom'd to groan, and trace his heavy loss
Within the tempting records of the past.—
What can we now but go and dig his grave?

Which in my sense, is charitable far
Beyond a world like this.

ISSACHAR

I am not bound
To yield in sorrow at this load of woe;
For it is selfish, and is paid to one
Not more deserving, and of fewer years
Than I and my wrong'd brethren. Were we dead,
A very little portion of this dole
Would fall to waste on us.

JUDAH

Peace, Issachar,
And do not wrangle o'er our father thus.
It may be he may never rise again,
For he is sorely wounded at this thing.

REUBEN

Oh! I did think my sorrow was so huge,
That not a corner was unfill'd by it;
But, Judah, thou hast touch'd me e'en to tears;
For the first word of kindness and concern
Has issued from thy lips. If I can e'er
Forget the cause why I should live to hate—
I'll love thee first.—Oh! taste the milk, my friends,
That flows from weeping Mercy's tender breast,
And lay your gall, that you may learn to soothe
The deep disquiet of your father's days.
The reverend image lying at your feet
Weak as a child, and hinting at a grave,
Loveth you more than you can ever think.
Those soilèd lips that breathe upon the dust,
Blessing your tranquil sleep, have often laid
Their tenderest kisses on your baby brows:

Those arms, spread out like branches of a tree
Fell'd for its barrenness, have ever strain'd
Your bosoms unto his: that strayèd beard,
White as the robe of pity (goodly sight!),
Gathers obedience from every eye,
And does impart benignity to all;—
While, above all, those reverend hands supine,
Under the smiles of Heaven, have still laid
Their prosperous blessings on your bowèd heads;
Therefore I pray you, even for your love,
Since that we cannot wholly patch his grief,
Yet to attend it with devoted eye,
And minister affection as we may.

JUDAH

You us'd no ceremony, Simeon,
And did affright him with the blunt display
Of that bestainèd coat. When he revives,
Use all the gentle language that you can.

REUBEN

See,—he breathes hard, and twitches at his brows;
A feverish dew upon his temples beads,
And nature struggles into action.—
Now place the cushion gently 'neath his head—
So—raise him tenderly—he doth revive—
Nay, Issachar, no art; we three can do it.
How is it, sir? Look on thy comforters.

JACOB

My brain is all commotion.—How is this?
Send Joseph to me.

REUBEN

Silence!—Do not speak.
His wits are dash'd a little from their sphere.

JACOB

A mystery 's upon me; but my grief
Openeth a door that letteth in the light.—
Oh! cruel reason, if thou wilt return,
For charity drive memory from thy train!—
What will become of me?—wretched and old!—

LEVI

Be patient, sir, and temper your lament.

JACOB

Where 's Simeon, I say? But now he stood
Waving a bloody banner in his hand,
Fell sign of carnage and of massacre.
Let him stand forth, and once more blast my sight
With the ensanguin'd garment of my boy—
How sad a sight to grieve a father's eye,
Worse than his dying blood from his own veins!—
Can I still see?—Will nothing strike me blind?
A sense so precious surely should not live
After a sight so rude; but since it does,
I'll keep it ever as a weeping cloud,
To wash this garment of its ugly stain,
Until it shall become as white and pure
As mountain snow, or wool imbued in milk.—
Ah! meagre recompense!—Oh! sorry shift!—
To fill the monstrous gap in my content.

SIMEON

Be patient, sir.

JACOB

Sir, I will not be so.
I was all patience when my boy did live,
Was all content, and silence, and repose;

And shall I be the same now he is dead?
Bless dull monotony, tongue-tie my grief,
And feel no sorrow for my doleful loss,
And smile upon old customs and affairs?—
Oh! I do loathe all habits that are pass'd,
All hours, and times, and practices of life;
And do more love the blood upon this cloth,
Than worlds of patience.—What should I do
With a heart so tough?—

REUBEN

A little think on God.

JACOB

Why, Reuben, so I do; but now I know
Man's grief is greater than man's reverence:
Soon I will wipe off this extremity,
And pray forgiveness that I am so rude
To rave upon the treasure I have lost.
Patience sits brooding yonder in the sky;
I cannot reach it with this feeble arm:
Let it descend, oh! Heaven, on my head,
For it doth burn as it would singe these locks
That count my years of service.

JUDAH

Still this Death
Does ever cheat us of our dearer friends:
Or either we must fade into his gloom,
Or tamely see them gather'd up before.
The end of all our days is but to die.
Our life 's a blank, oblivion, mystery:
A curious complex action upon time,
Which revelation can alone explain.
Since God and nature do demand so much,
Why let us not rebel in our complaint,

But yield to what in wisdom is decreed.
Had Joseph liv'd to look upon our graves,
That grief were his which now we spend for him,
And still he must have follow'd to the tomb ;—
Therefore, by hurrying on so far before,
He loses but so many days of life,
Which at the best is but fantastical,
And doth escape the monstrous sorrow which
Would wait on our decay.

JACOB

I am so sore,
That every good which tends to comfort me
Doth make me wince and shrink upon the pain,
Like rubs upon the rawness of the flesh.—
Why, what 's all this unto my Joseph's face ?—
His voice, which I shall never hear again,
That through my ear did steal unto my heart,
And stir it to the object of his speech ?—
His sober eye tending to generous smiles,
Where I have seen the figure of my face
Imag'd as in his mother's, even Rachel's—
His youthful virtue and affection ?—
His tenderness and yearning unto me ?—
I am a father mourning a dear son,—
Oh ! never, never to return again
To bless my sight or soothe my dying hour.—
Mourn ye, also ; for you have lost a youth
Who would have been the honour of your tribe,
And was enthronèd in your father's heart.

LEVI

What can we do to moderate your pain ?
The tyrant Sorrow spurns us and our cares,
And still will run his round.

JACOB

You cannot tell
The kind of sorrow I am doom'd to bear.
No son did ever grieve for a dead sire
As fathers do at losing a lov'd child;
Their sympathy is youthful, like their age,
And jointly form'd of love and duty mix'd.
Honour, respect, obedience sways their minds,
O'ertopp'd by filial affection:—
But ours are ungovern'd qualities,
Liberal and unctuous as the dew from heaven;
As instinct, hope, and fear, and boundless love,
Far-sighted watchfulness, and wakeful care;
And fearful soundings in this dragon world,
To find them easy footings to their graves;
And herald thoughts, sent wingèd with desire,
To bustle for their comfort and repose—
This is the service of our dainty love:—
While they grow up in wilfulness and ease,
Not noting all the workings of our hearts;
Resting like stripling branches on our stem,
Free from the wind, and shelter'd from the storm.
I never heard of any father's son
Who griev'd himself into his father's tomb;
But well I know, and clearly do I feel,
That a dead son preys on a father's life.
It is a law balanc'd by Nature's hand,
Docile to reason, bred of circumstance.—
Youth, like a jocund wanderer, starteth forth
To take his venturous journey in the world,
And ever as he goes he culls those joys
And pleasures growing in his onward path
(Not dull'd by insipidity and use),
Keeping fast hold upon the clue of hope;—

The music in the future that he hears
Restrains his backward gaze, where all mischance
Is shook unwelcome from his memory.
But when grave Time showers from his shaking hand
The snow of age, o'ersilvering the crown,
Mingled with notions of eternity,
Then taketh he his stand upon the hill,
Viewing his downward journey, that doth stretch
Into oblivion, through the vale of tombs;
Gathers his mantle o'er his thoughtful brows,
O'er-reading all the way that he has pass'd,
And loves the world (like an old parting friend)
As feeling he must fade from his abode;
And calls the circle of his comforts round,
Counting them over with a jealous eye;
And maketh much of them, and still doth cling
The faster as he steps into his grave,
Hopeful of Heaven, yet tenable of earth.
Then think what vivid sorrow I must feel,
Whose strength has fail'd me in the stress of days,
To have my child thus ravish'd from my breast,
Whom I have look'd upon so many years,
Who was my flesh, and did inherit all
The grace there is in me, crown'd with his own.
I thought to leave my image on the earth,
Fairly o'erflourish'd in my goodly boy,
And therein to re-live my date of life,
And teach his fellows that old Jacob still
Was honour'd, by reflection, in the land;—
But he is dead, and I am left to mourn,
And tire on pangèd recollection.—
Ah! do you weep, my boys?—You have good cause.

JUDAH

These words of yours do touch us very near.—
Father, perchance young Joseph is not slain,
But being beset by beasts, did shed his coat,
And is miscarried in some unknown place,
And fled away alive.

JACOB

Nay, Judah, nay!
Sorrow is all that I have left me now—
Oh! cheat me not of that!—The boy is dead —
Conviction long hath waited at the gate,
And I was deaf, refusing entrance;
But now that he is master of the house,
Peace glideth in to keep him company.

JUDAH

'Tis hard to say what is become of him.

JACOB

That I can tell, triumphant o'er my woe:
He is a spirit, purified from taint,
Catching a glory from the court of Heaven,
And brighten'd o'er by an angelic light,
Shot from the dread magnificence within.
He tends the threshold of the mighty gate,
Amid a host of wingèd messengers:
Angels adoring catch the whisperings
Of the unearthly and mysterious hymn,
Tending to glorify the name of God,
And sweeping round His throne.—Oh! were I not
His father or his kin, I should rejoice
In his high exaltation. Yet, alas!
I am but flesh, therefore my feeling will

Still war against my judgement and my sense.
Better serve God in Heaven than on earth :—
Yet I do envy Heaven of my boy,
And crave to have him here about my side,
Though he were taken from the blissful sky :—
Carry me in, for I am very weak,
And let there be no noise. [*Exit.*

END OF THE FIRST ACT

ACT II

Prologue

Sudden authority in those inur'd
To forcing of offensive offices
On men, in stubbornness and discontent,
Begets a churlish spirit; like to his
Who tames a bear with hunger and with blows,
Turning its nature to his purposes.
Treatment like this young Joseph did receive
At the Egyptians' mercenary hands;
Who in their power did indulge themselves
In bitter threats, in grudgings and contempt.
These things do little where the greater are;
For Joseph was departed from himself
Like one who sleeps and dreameth of events;
Or with imagination fondleth still
In pain and passion on a former joy:
And as he journey'd still he turn'd his face
Towards bright Canaan and its misty hills:
And as the evening time of folding came,
Of morning prayer and brotherly repast,
His eyes did pierce to heaven thro' his tears;
And all his features struggled with sharp pain
To wear obedience to the will of God,
And overtop his sorrow in content.
So selfish was he in this heartfelt grief,
And so resolv'd to be obedient
In all mischance that should befall to him

(Seeing he had sought favour at His hand
Who cannot know us without patience),
That he still bore a cheerful countenance
In all his drudgery and offices;
Turning rough speeches with a gentle look,
Wooing respect by execution;
And by forbearance and a temperate tongue
Stealing from out the bosoms of these men
The sting of anger and the fang of wrath.
So as their journey did decrease in leagues
Their favour and their love did cleave to him.—
At length they left the forest and the hill,
The wholesome green, and on the barren sands
Crept on their burning way, where man ne'er comes,
Save the marauder sweeping o'er the plain,
Upon a palfrey fleeter than the wind,
Fearful of officers and men at arms—
Like as the ostrich watchful from afar
Measures his flight, and aids him with his wings,
Screaming towards the desert hard pursued,
Urg'd by the horsemen's javelin and bow
Who seek his rolling feathers for their pride:
So flies the bandit, coursèd by his fears,
Bearing large wine-skins from the city gates
To his companions in the wilderness,
Who curse with parchèd lips his long delay;
With faces freckled black by the fierce sun,
And hands that hunt the lion and the man.
They cleanse their scimitars of stainèd blood
And hang their scalding armour on the boughs,
Midway within a rugged precipice
Browing the raving cataract beneath,
While overhead the grey clouds sail in light
Like drovèd camels dreaming in the sun.
Long time their wheels indent the weary miles,

And many signs and landmarks still remain
To cheer their sickening courage and fatigue;
And oftentimes they scare the wary mule
And gather'd vultures (sign of carrion),
Gorging on what the bear and wolf have left,
Greeting disturbance with a deafening cry;
While sailing warily to distant strands
They stand and safely watch the slow retreat;
And where a barren rock doth forkèd rise,
Old eagles perch'd, unweary of the sun,
With dreamy eyes returning his regard
As tho' his dazzling fire but lull'd their pride:
Meanwhile their eaglets in the gushing spring
Which Providence has wisely planted there,
Mapping its way upon the level sand,
Bathe their young wings. In this immensity
Upon the droughthy sands doth silence dwell—
And wandering winds are lost in loneliness—
Sweeping its level surface without end;
Like to a drove of wolves who miss the track,
And wind a circle and shoot forth again,
Perplexedly in a maze monotonous
Howling their savage discord at the moon.
The fiery heat doth beat against the ground
In a reflective waste of golden light;
Nor tree, nor shrub chequers the tedious blank:
Like a dull stain curs'd o'er with barrenness
Sear'd in the angry glances of the sun.—
Anon they come unto the oozy Nile,
Where the sweet wind doth dally with the sedge,
Peopled with insects strange—of gorgeous dyes,
Where the secretive sun conception breeds
Over the ebbèd bottom, that engluts
The fecund grain; so that pale Fear almost
Possesseth watchful Famine of his being;——

River of speckled snakes and adders blue,
And thriving birds that forage in the slime
To nourish nestlings on the sandy plain,
Tiring the wing towards the wilderness,—
Of armèd crocodiles, whose scales defy
Sol's penetrative beams, in slothful ease
Slumbering upon the bosom of the stream,
And as a cloud drifts to the tide of air,
So they in shapeful course obey the flood.
The alligator there in rushy mew
Doth snare the supple weasel to his jaws,
Scenting the mangled carrion in his throat.—
The golden snake out-rollèd like a cloud
At sunset, when the umber sand gleams red,
Teases the restless spirit of a hawk
Who hath descended on his craven food,
And with his ardent eye by fear illum'd,
And blacker in its lustre than a swan's,
Charmeth his object with his dazzling gaze,
Fencing his shifts as valour doth contend
With certain fear, seizing his faint regard
Until the victim yields to nature's law:
The valiant prisoner with the yellow spurs
Drops from his prey, is prey'd upon in turn.
And now behold! the guard come scouring in
With slacken'd bow athwart the shoulder slung,
Cross'd by the taper lance, whose pennon red
Plays like a flickering flame upon the wind.
Three times they note upon the drowsy horn,—
Joyful announce that water is at hand.
The o'erwrought camels by their eagerness
Had long proclaim'd the presence of fresh springs;
Never more welcome was the cry of land
To mariners bewilder'd on the main.—
And now farewell fatigue and languishment;

The many gaps that weariness had made
In their long line of march were soon fill'd up,
And silence dull was chang'd to cries of joy.
As the wild hymn to Isis shakes the air
The kneeling camels yield their burdens up,
And scour away a swift instinctive course
To crop the rare and straggling tufts of grass
In the vicinity of water pools.
The tents are pitch'd, the horses are all stak'd,
And the square bales of merchandise up-pil'd,
Show like a circling compact city wall.
Now as a swarm of bees when an eclipse
Surprises them with artificial night,
Come pouring in, wedging the entrance up,
Encumbering all the wax-built avenues
And golden galleries of their citadel,—
So here, oh! wonder, where so late entwin'd
Young Silence and old Time slept side by side,
On this forlorn and barren wilderness
A populous city on a sudden springs,
Teeming with man and beast all full of life,
Bustle and movement in their enterprise.
Now nature's cravings being satisfied,
Behold Fatigue, so lately scared aloof,
Once more approaching with a stealthy step,
And all, enamour'd of its soft embrace,
Yield to entrancèd slumber, shadowy dreams,
Fantastic reflex of their wanderings,
Form'd of the vastness of the elements;
Light now becomes more solid, never dark
When blinded by a heavy summer dew,
Barely opaque, and nature's murmurings,
Or rather the mysterious life of night,
Mingling is lost in an oblivious calm.
Thus gentle night into day's mantle glides;

It is no more than if the golden day
Enfolded her within a silver veil,
Or when the diver 'mid the coral rocks
Sees many a fathom through the liquid main.
And now with wakeful and accustom'd eye
The guards, attended by their wary dogs,
Form a wide circle round the encampèd host
To keep their weary watch : and as the hours,
Though to the sleepers but a single link,
To them an endless ever-dragging chain,
Touch close upon the middle of the watch,
The dogs give sign of interruption.
No sound, or near or distant, strikes the ear
Upon the velvet carpet of the sands.
See yonder sombre mass advancing swift !
Is it the fleeting shadow of a cloud,
Or else a compact herd of prowling beasts ?
Perhaps, dire danger on these barren plains,
Banded marauders on their wingèd steeds,
Who, having track'd their victims through the day,
Come now to fall upon them in their sleep,
And fill the air with cries of blood and death.
But suddenly they stop in mid career
As though aware of man's vicinity,
These nightly wanderers in the wilderness,
Seeking from far a change of pasturage ;
The guard whose heart beats fast and audibly
Already hath his horn upon his lips,
And the keen hound, scarce by a gesture stay'd,
Crouches half buried in the indented sand.
All needless caution, for the intruders turn
With rapid flight towards the mountain'd west,
Are sudden lost in dim obscurity.
But though the camp still slumbers undisturb'd,
'Tis not for long this sweet oblivion

For the vex'd guard who rocks him to and fro
On the uncertain balance of his spear,
At odds with sleep, with eyes weigh'd down, subdued,
Whose sense of hearing lingers on the edge
And painful confines of half consciousness,
And blendeth with its fading powers :—a noise
Like a loud whispering hangeth in the air!
As it approaches nearer it becomes
Like the north wind when rushing through the trees,
Thence to a roaring and a hissing sound
As when the storm makes havoc in the sails
And cordage taut of some be-tossèd ship,
In answering discord to the seething waves;
Now he looks up, behold, in darken'd space,
As a huge dragon stretching many a rood,
The birds of night as blended into one,
In the obscurity themselves have made,
Bent on their measur'd migratory flight,
Wing their slow way across the desert sands,
Aweary of the forage they have left,
Shunning the inhospitable Dead Sea shore,
Where fish nor fowl make willing residence,
Shaping their course with oblique certitude
Towards the ever-teeming fruitful Nile.
And now the advance guard wheels above the camp,
Sweeps a wide circle and descends more near,
With a prolong'd and simultaneous cry,
Gives notice to thy myriads who respond
With deafening clamour warping on the air,
Rise higher and hold on their safer course.
The camp is rous'd in wild bewilderment,
All rush in terror madly to their arms,
As sudden fallen on the day of doom.

The morning sees them once more on the march,
And many a weary day and lingering night
Is still betwixt them and their journey's end.
At length they cross and leave the unctuous flood;
Dreamy Egyptians in the outer field
Scatter the grain in swolten idleness,
And yonder towers and turrets now arise
From parchèd Egypt's city, rude and old.
The Egyptian shouted and to Joseph spake:
'Since I do find you worthy of your hire,
Courteous and willing in your servitude;
Withal endued with a fair knowledge, far
Beyond your young experience and your years,
I shall dispose you to some officer,
Some man of state and good ability;
Whereby the comfort of your life to come
Will be increas'd by trust and fair regard,
E'en as you rise in favour with your lord:
And I shall gain a profit better worth
Than were you barter'd at the common mart
For common hire.'—Young Joseph but replied:
'God's will be done.'—But this benign intent
Was thwarted by the malice of the chief
Into whose hands young Joseph fell by lot,
And as if fatally he was decreed
To drain the cup of anguish to the dregs,
Was without mercy driven to the mart
With every mark of barbarous cruelty.
Might it not be design'd by Providence
That Joseph's patience and humility
Should merit the reward and dignities
Reserv'd for his high exaltation?
To an Egyptian lord of great estate
Nam'd Potiphar, the captain of the guard
Of Pharaoh, king of Egypt—unto him

Was Joseph sold a bondsman to his will.
But Potiphar (a man of gentle blood),
Seeing young Joseph's merit, put him straight
Into some trust, and by degrees increas'd
His favour and regard (following desert).
So Joseph lived in honourable bonds,
The steward of his household and affairs.
Meanwhile his grievèd father mourn'd his loss
As tho' he had been ravish'd from the earth.

SCENE I.—*Potiphar's House.*

POTIPHAR *and* JOSEPH.

POTIPHAR

Wear this gold chain.

JOSEPH

You honour me, my lord.

POTIPHAR

Young man, my pride is lesser than my truth,
And fair desert should be respected well,
But most of all when native in a slave.
This chain I give thee, not to pay thy worth,
Only to honour it; for I have found
Since thou hast had mine office in thine hand,
Thy government has brought me more respect,
More honour and renown, than ever yet
Did wait upon mine own; and hence I know
Thy God is with thee, that thy office thrives,
And I am made partaker of the good;
Wherefore I love and honour thee as much
As wert thou born my brother. Thy respect

Has been to me as great as ever child's
Was to its sire :—Faith, it is very strange—
It seems man's pleasure is allied to tears,
For my eyes burn to talk upon thy love,
As tho' I did not leave thee here in trust,
But were about to quit thee without date,
Forecasting final separation.

JOSEPH

My most just lord!

POTIPHAR

I must go hence to-night:
The king doth send me on an embassy;
Yet I go not while thou remain'st behind;
Therefore the offices and trusts I leave
Sleep in my ear as things already done.
Use my house freely; tend my lady's will:
Thou'lt find obedience in my trusty slaves,—
Therefore command thy pleasures. Thou hast earn'd
A fair and honour'd fellowship with me,
Wherein I gain: so fare thee well, and peace
Be ever with thee, guardian of my house. [*Exit.*

JOSEPH

How have I earn'd a happiness like this?
Patience, great God, was all my quality;
Thou hast rewarded me beyond my worth.—
Ah! 'tis the way of bounteous Providence
With those whose stubbornness doth cede to peace:
And he who bears repeated trials well,
With gentle and rebukeless temperance,
Under the angel's wing doth take his stand;
And for his faith and human fortitude

Meets his reward on earth.—Oh! patience,
I never will forsake thee, though this joy
Were turn'd into a moan—protect me still. [*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*A Chamber in Potiphar's House.*

Enter PHRAXANOR *and* JOSEPH.

PHRAXANOR

Ha—ha—ha!—
I check in my laughter; dost thou notice it?
Can'st tell me why?

JOSEPH

Madam, I have not thought.

PHRAXANOR

Wert thou to guess on the left side of me
Thou'dst wake the knowledge.

JOSEPH

How so?—I do not see.

PHRAXANOR

Because my heart doth grow on the left side.—
A grievèd spirit oft beguiles itself
With laughter and affected idleness;
But all this while a perilous weight will hang
About the breast, threatening its boasted peace;
And, like Time's finger on the dial's hand,
Will stop it at the hour.—Ah, me!—alas!
My mirth was of my head, not of my heart,
And mock'd my patience.

JOSEPH

I am griev'd at this.

PHRAXANOR

Nay, no physician e'er did heal a wound
By grieving at the hurt. Yet a white hand
O'erspreaded by the tendril veins of youth
Hath quieted a lady's gentle side,
And taught her how to smile.

JOSEPH

Madam, indeed
A simple thing that 's honourably fair
Doth match my understanding and my wit.
A complex riddle I could never learn,
And am amaz'd at your astrologers,
Who fancy they foretell the act of Fate,
By virtue of their gravity and beards,
With pondering eye still searching in a cloud,
With consecrated wand of ebon wood
Still groping for the jewel in the straw.

PHRAXANOR

Oh! wise on the wrong side. If you would learn
Strange matters, never choose a woman's tongue;
For I perceive you still do swerve aside
From tutoring of theirs.

JOSEPH

Would I could catch
The motive of your words. My duty bids
To answer you becoming my estate.

PHRAXANOR

You might be pleas'd to catch it from my eyes—
Do they look anger'd?

JOSEPH

Gentle, to a fault.

PHRAXANOR

They match my heart, for I have passions, sir;
And did I catch them pregnant with a spleen,
Fiery or tame, or when I would command
Their lustre to be tempting with encouragement,
To any friend that 's dear unto my breast,
I'd pluck them out.

JOSEPH

Madam ?

PHRAXANOR

They are fair eyes—
I know they are. For I have often paus'd
At eve of sinking to the silken bath
With maiden admiration at their power
Reflected in the water like twin stars;
Yours bear upon their colour.

JOSEPH

Madam, you did
Command me to your presence, and I pray
If you have cause for my attendance here
Yet make it known unto your servant's ear.
I've learn'd of my lord's kindness the respect
Due to your honour'd service, and believe
That though he is far distant from his home,
His heart remains with me and my good trust.

PHRAXANOR

Joseph, no more of that!

JOSEPH

Madam, alas!

PHRAXANOR

Thou dwell'dst in Canaan, said'st thou ?

JOSEPH

Madam, I did.

PHRAXANOR

What kind of air ?

JOSEPH

Warm and congenial.

PHRAXANOR

Indeed ?—I've generally heard that men
Are favour'd of the climate where they live.
Bethink thee—surely our hot Egypt has
Swolten thy recollection of the place.
Thou'rt like a man that 's nurtur'd upon ice,
Fed with a spongy snow, and rear'd upon
A mountain's top where winds do freeze the air.—
Congenial, said'st thou ?—There 's no drop that 's warm
Coursing another round those purple veins.—
Here, let me touch thy hand—it is cold—cold—
I've Egypt's sun in mine.

JOSEPH

Pure fire indeed.
You do mistake ; my hand is not so cold ;
Though I confess I've known it warmer far,
For I have struggled against heated blood,
And am proficient in forbearances.

PHRAXANOR

Indeed ? Are women's wits, then, merely dust
Blown by a puff of resolution
Into their doting eyes ?

JOSEPH

Wit is but air—
For dust the queen becomes; if she be good,
She breaks to gold and diamond dust, past worth,
The proper metal of a perfect star:
If she be not, embalming is no cure.

PHRAXANOR

Come, Joseph, how you play upon my words—
Nay leave this wrangling—thy small mouth in sooth
Was made for sweeter talk. Nay, throw aside
This ponderous mask of gravity you wear,
Or give it me, and I will cast it forth
To where my husband governs his affairs;
It will not reach him, nor be recogniz'd
More than if he were blind.—Come here, I say—
Come here.

JOSEPH

What would you, madam? I attend.

PHRAXANOR

Why, put your fingers on my burning brow
That you have stirr'd into this quenchable heat,
And touch the mischief that your eye has made—
Do it, I say, or I will raise the house.—
Why, that is well. Now I will never say
A sudden word to startle thee again,
But use the gentlest breath a woman has.—
Aye, now you may remove your hand—yet stay—
I did not say withdraw it—you mistake:—
You are too jealous of the wondrous toy;
Leave it with me and I will give you mine;

I hold it as a bird that I do love
Yet fear to lose.—Fie on that steward's ring—
Now should it slip, 'twill fall into my neck.

JOSEPH

My lord did order, ere he left the house,
That certain merchants should be furnish'd forth
Of the king's stores, and of his proper trust:
They do attend me, and I must not let
The keys rust idly at the steward's side.
To honourable service I am bound,
By duteous love unto our honour'd lord;
And this is just; therefore I take my leave. [*Exit.*

PHRAXANOR

Scar'd like a timid dove when suddenly
A human face looks in upon its nest!
Now should I be reveng'd of mine own face,
And with my nails dig all this beauty out,
And pit it into honeycombs.—Yet, no:
I will enjoy the air, feed daintily,
Be bountiful in smiles, and grace my charms,
As the blown rose is beautified by leaves,
Which else shows barely 'mongst the barren twigs:
For he who will not stoop him for desire,
Strides o'er that pity which is short of death.
What! to be pitied where I would be lov'd!—
Go to—I rather would be scorn'd outright,
Nor lose myself in looking for my loss.
The spring is full of flowers where to choose;
And independence is the art of love,
As giving no temptation unto power,
Which in the untouch'd heart grows to contempt.
She is a fool who beats her milky breast
To find the pleasure which her lover wears

As careless as the feather in his cap.
This boy is young, honest, and virtuous:
But he is also beautiful to see.
It cannot be that honesty which lives
Like to a beggar—or a miser, more—
Minute by minute weighing of itself,
Should quench the property of youthful blood.—
I'll hang my arms, love's trophies, round his neck;
No premature dull winter in his hand
Will strike the citron from so fair a tree;
Nor will autumnal languishment decaying
Leave me to sicken on so fair a stalk.—
Vaporous desire like a flame delay'd
Creeps with my pulse and babbles of its bounds,
Too mean, too limited a girth for it.
Impatience frets me—yet I will be proud,
And muse upon the conquest ere 'tis won—
For won it shall be.—Oh! dull Potiphar,
To leave thy wife and travel for thy thrift,
While such a spirit tendeth her her wine.
Ho—give me music, there!—play louder—so!
[*Exit.*

SCENE III.—*Potiphar's House.*

Enter PHRAXANOR *and* Attendant.

PHRAXANOR

Dost thou despise love, then?

ATTENDANT

Madam, not quite;
A ruby that is pure is better worth

Than one that 's flaw'd and streakèd with the light :
So is a heart.

PHRAXANOR

A ruby that is flaw'd
Is better worth than one that 's sunk a mile
Beneath the dry sand of some desert place :
So is a heart.

ATTENDANT

Then, madam, you would say
That there is nothing in the world but love.

PHRAXANOR

Not quite : but I would say the fiery sun
Doth not o'ershine the galaxy so far ;
Nor doth a torch within a jewell'd mine
Amaze the eye beyond this diamond here,
More than the ruddy offices of love
Do glow before the common steps of life.

ATTENDANT

It is a knowledge worth the stooping for.

PHRAXANOR

The soul's supremacy admits no sex :
I am a woman, and am proud of it.
We are content that man shall take the lead,
Knowing he ever will look back on us
With doting eye, not caring how he steps.
Walking thus blindly, we may guide him so
That he shall turn which way shall please us best :
So we can beckon him where'er we will,
And lead him ever round about his grave,

And in whene'er we list.——
All matters that are greater than ourselves
Do trace their secret graces to our hands.
For glory captains struggle in the fight,
And play against the bulwark of the foe
The o'erbrowing engines in the stubborn siege;
But love doth brace the garland on his head,
Making proud victory sweeter than it is.
What warlike prince did doff his laurel yet
But he did cast it in some fair maid's lap,
Saying, 'My greatness I commit to thee,
Mistress of it, and me, and my proud heart'?
He who has won whate'er he still desir'd,
Strewing his path with flowers of sweet success,
Is yet a poor and melancholic man,
Sad as a beggar craving in a porch,
Being denied the woman he does love.
Love doth attach on independency:
Bravery of suits enriching the bright eye,
Sweetness of person, pleasure in discourse,
And all the reasons why men love themselves;
Nay, even high offices, renown and praise,
Greatness of name, honour of men's regard,
Power and state and sumptuous array,
Do pay a tribute to the lips of love,
Fetching their freshness and their darling grace
From woman's approbation,—waiting still
Close to her elbow till she please to smile
Upon the cause whereof the man is proud,
And say that it is well: our witchery
Doth claim their rarity, as our prime jest:
Tho' but the footstool of a royal king,
When we betray and trip him to the earth
His crown doth roll beneath us.—Horses have not
Such power to grace their lords or break their necks

As we, for we add passion to our power.
They think us gentle, second unto them,
And blind them to the wheels whereon we work.
Our will is the strong rudder to our bark;
Our wit, the sails; beauty, the swelling tide;
Caprice, the tackle, serving to all winds,—
Tho' light as nothing, yet it tells like truth;
And constancy, the anchor that 's upheav'd,
For ever falling and yet never struck.
Thus do we voyage o'er the fickle world,
Marking our image upon every wave,
Still moving onward to what port we will.
Aye, there it is! who can control our wills?
Judgement and knowledge, grey-beard wisdom, are
Devoted straw unto our burning will.—
We will not fear: and if we spy a toy
We'll reach it from the moon, with sudden hand—
Why—what shall stop us in our enterprise?

ATTENDANT

Madam, your speech is fire.

PHRAXANOR

Doth it burn you?

ATTENDANT

I did not think that I had liv'd so long
As I have liv'd.

PHRAXANOR

Indeed!—why do you blush?

ATTENDANT

Because I never dar'd to trust my thought,
And, lo! it has escap'd.

PHRAXANOR

Do you, then, love?

ATTENDANT

In sooth I ever fear'd to call it love:
I knew a minstrel who had fallen in love,
And, though he sung the more his plaintive notes,
Yet never was he merry any more.

PHRAXANOR

A wanton waste of frail mortality
To keep the portal of a sepulchre,
And wet a pleading lute with mellow tears,
And hoop the heart with melancholy strains!
That man does dote upon his very grief;—
The gaudy-colour'd story of his mind,
Imagination, is his bed-fellow;
The past and future being both forgot,
The precious present running all to waste.
There is an ancient fashion in the world,—
E'en sigh and choose again.

ATTENDANT

This may be well.

PHRAXANOR

It is the fivefold custom of the day.

ATTENDANT

One flower in my bosom were enough,
And I have got one in my memory
I would not part with for a wilderness,
Oh! it is delicate and lovely too,
Beyond the grossness of this heartless world.

Your pardon, madam, in all your chronicles
I never knew you credit your own sex
For perfect truth.

PHRAXANOR

Because it is a fable.

ATTENDANT

I hope not, madam.

PHRAXANOR

Nay, it is a fable:
Give me your arm over these ivory steps,—
I'll sit in my lord's high seat, and prove it so.
Truth is sublime; the unique excellence;
The height of wisdom, the supreme of power,
The principle and pivot of the world,
The keystone that sustains the archèd heavens;
And Time, the fragment of Eternity,
Eternity itself, but fills the scale
In truth's untrembling hand. His votaries
Belong to him entire, not he to them;
The immolation must be all complete,
And woman still makes reservation.
Our feeling doth resemble the king's coin,
No counterfeit, for it doth bear our weight,
The perfect image, absolute, enthron'd:
Now, the king's coin belongs to many men,
And only by allowance is call'd his:
Just so our feeling stands with circumstance.
Whene'er the king doth give a golden mark,
The addition is the image of himself.
'Tis so with woman's feeling—mark me well;
'Tis true we have the power to love and hate,
Indulge antipathies and sympathies;

But power to pierce through thought to absolute truth,—
Man's reasoning imagination,—still
Is compromis'd in our maternal sex;
Ours is a present, not an abstract power;
And, with it, so much art, which, in a woman,
Did never fail to make a giant kneel.
If Art and Honesty do run a race,
Which tumbles in the mire? Ask those who starve.
Love is the purest essence of our souls,
And who can tell how many modest maids
Have paid its tribute in an early tomb,
The martyrs of our proper sacrifice!
Question the practice and I do avouch,
So marr'd is Nature, that this constancy
(The rarest jewel that the world can boast)
Is the fine failing of our weaker sex;
For men affirm, and I believe it too,
That Truth is greater than the world beside:
Therein we flag, herein our weakness faints:
Meekness and patience, tenderness and love,
These qualities are our inheritance;
Knowledge and wisdom, love of truth and power,
Are the strong engines in the heart of man.
Our chiefest virtue is our fortitude:
Yet maids who die in love do lack it much,
Showing the world a bauble to their griefs.
Our chiefest power is our stubborn will,
Which we do lack the constancy to check,
Seeing it is our agent and not Truth's,
A giant dwarf, to forage for ourselves.
Therefore, since Truth requires that I should lay
Me prostrate at her foot and worship her,
Rather than wield her sceptre and her power,

I shall be bold to follow mine own way,
And use the world as I find wit and means;
And as I know of nothing but old age
To bound my will, so nothing will I fear.—
But I waste words: you do not understand.

ATTENDANT

Madam, assuredly your speech doth sound
Like sense—I cannot tell——

PHRAXANOR

Silence, no more.
Suppose you did expect the man you love
To wait on you about this place and time,
What habit and behaviour would you use?

ATTENDANT

Were I, like you, a lady of estate,
I would adorn my brow with a bright star
Of crusted diamond's lustre—stain'd with gold,
Like to a frosted sunflower, when the morn
Blinks in the east, and plays upon its front.
My hair should bear a tiara of bright gems;
And all my velvet should be loop'd about
With colours blending into harmony.
I would sip water fragranc'd with sweet gum,
To give my breathing sweetness. Half reclin'd,
I would receive him with a free discourse
Which he should lead, wherein I'd acquiesce.

PHRAXANOR

Ah, child! there lies more mischief in a smile
Than in the king's own house, and all his waste
Of wreathèd gold and weighty jewelry.—
Come, help to dress me straight.

ATTENDANT

What fashion, madam?

PHRAXANOR

The sultry hour well suits occasion;—
That silk of gossamer like tawny gold—
Throw it on loosely:—so, 'tis well; yet stay,—
See to the neck; fit thou some tender lace
About the rim. The precious jewel shown
But scantily is oft desired most,
And tender nets scare not the timid bird.
A little secret is a tempting thing
Beyond wide truth's confession.—Give me flowers
That I may hang them in my ample hair;
And sprinkle me with lavender and myrrh.
Zone me around with a broad chain of gold,
And wreathe my arms with pearls.—So—this will do—
And in good time, for yonder Joseph comes,
[*Aside.*
Which saves me the command to bring him here:
Give me a cup of wine.

ATTENDANT

Amber or purple?

PHRAXANOR

Amber with the spice of Araby.—
I hear his measur'd yet elastic step
Staidly advance along the corridor,
And from this damask'd alcove unobserv'd
Can contemplate his beauty as he comes.
What thoughtful wisdom in that face of youth,
Blending in sweetness and in harmony;

An eye that beams with gravity and fire,—
Too much of that:—that must be tam'd, subdued
To the great secret,—charm'd to oblivion:—
That marble front a veinèd tablet fair,
Whereon my lips shall trace my history;
His hair of that rare tint, nor black nor brown,
Of olive amber'd in the sun's bright rays,
That love to linger in its massy folds,
Which o'er his shoulders, like a vexèd wave,
Rolls in disorder'd order, gracefully
Meandering and curling on itself.
Youthful perfection, like a bursting rose,
Glows into manhood, and yet lingers still
In the proportions fine of moulding power,
Partaking of the flower and the bud.
A living grace, repose in action,
O'erclouds him like an element divine:
A fabled angel waiting for his wings,—
Surely this man's inspir'd!——
In his retiring modesty lies hid
A secret charm of native innocence.
Ah! too much virtue is a naughty crime
That never yet grew old in this grey world.
Oh! for an artist with a subtle hand,
A soul inflam'd, ahunger'd of renown,
To deck my chamber with this undrap'd grace!
Lo! I find nature is a novelty,—
The silken study of a courtier's life,
Fading before this youth's simplicity.

Enter JOSEPH.

JOSEPH

Madam, so please——

PHRAXANOR

I'll hear thee by and by.
Myrah, depart; yet stay, and first arrange
My sandal, that unseemly doth escape.
Higher still there, where the transparent silk
Tapers towards the ankle. Have a care;
Let me not have to chide this fault again.
[*Exit* Attendant.

JOSEPH

Madam, I have a message from my lord.

PHRAXANOR

Put that to rest. Give me that golden box,
'Tis fill'd with precious spikenard, queen of scents.
[*She spills it on his head.*

JOSEPH

Madam, what must I say? My state is low,
Yet you do treat me as you might my lord
When he besought your hand.

PHRAXANOR

Must I get up,
And cast myself in thy sustaining arms,
To sink thee to a seat?—Come, sit thou here.
Now I will neighbour thee and tell thee why
I cast that ointment on thee.

JOSEPH

I did not
Desire it.

PHRAXANOR

You did ask me for it.

JOSEPH

Madam!

PHRAXANOR

You breath'd upon me as you did advance,
And sweets do love sweets for an offering.
My breath is sweet and subtle, yet I dar'd
Not put my lips half close enough to thine
To render back the favour; so I say
The obligation did demand as much—
Why, what amaze is now upon thy face—
Will nothing please?

JOSEPH

Madam, your arm—pray move.

PHRAXANOR

You peevish bird—like a sick eagle I
Could fain devour, but may not.

JOSEPH

I beesech you,
If you respect your place, or my fair name,
Undo your prisoning arms and let me go.

PHRAXANOR

Tremble to fear the woman you might love.

JOSEPH

Indeed, I would far sooner honour her.

PHRAXANOR

Cold, cold, still cold; I eye you like to one
That dieth in my arms: beware you chill
Me too: you do a wrong, and herein court

Much danger. I would risk the world for you;
But blow me cold with your sharp frosty breath,
And these same arms that gird you round about
May turn to bitter chains. We are most dear
In our affections; in vengeance most resolv'd.

JOSEPH

Madam, I have a spirit beyond fear.
God knows the duty that I owe your lord
Would break my heart did I commit this sin.
But madam, hear the reason that I have,
Why my lord's honour dearer is than life.
I do remember me, when first I came
Into this land of Egypt, fugitive,
Forlorn, and wretched, bruisèd at the heart,
An iron collar round about my neck,
Degrading mark of bitter servitude,
Stall'd in the press of slaves upon the mart,
Brimful of misery unto the crown,
Forlorn, cast out, abandon'd, and bereav'd,
A certain man did look into my face,
As though to penetrate my very soul.
By slow degrees conviction work'd on him,
And through my sufferings he read my heart,
And all his features melted at the sight.
A sacred pity stole into his eyes,
That dwelt on me in gentle tenderness.
Oh! balm of sweetness, what a holy joy
Pour'd like a flood into my thousand wounds
Of soul and body's sore affliction,
Whereof I languish'd in my pilgrimage!
With his own hands he drew my collar off,
Nor barter'd with the merchant for my price.
He took me to his house, put me in trust,
Justly and wisely kept his eyes on me,

Weighing with care my actions and desert,
And by degrees receiv'd me to his breast,
O'erloaded me with benefits, and chang'd
A chain of iron for a chain of gold,
A wolf-skin kirtle for a purple cloak,
A life of wretchedness for one of peace,
A broken heart to love and tenderness.
This man, so full of human charities,
Had many precious treasures, which he gave
To me in trust, but far above the rest
Was one in which all others were absorb'd,
As in a holy consecrated shrine,
Source of his life, his honour's nourishment,
The loss of which would be a fell decree
Of shame, despair, and infamy, and death.
Madam, this honour'd, honourable man,
Was noble Potiphar, your lord and mine.
Need I add more ?——
I pray you let us talk on common things.

PHRAXANOR

Neither I am not beautiful, perhaps,—
Set up to be the universal fool.
Why, here 's a waste of parti-colour'd words—
High-sounding phrases, empty eloquence.
'My lord ! my lord.' It scenteth of reproach.
Sir, have a care—blood waits on insult, ha !
One way or other I will have your heart.

JOSEPH [*Aside.*

This wondrous creature is of faultless mould,
And grace plays o'er the movement of her limbs,
Her marvellous beauty irresistible,
A double charm, abandons languishment,
In soft repose, hints at oblivion.

In motion her imperious dignity,
At secret hours, might dictate to the king.
A most unscrupulous voluptuousness
Mars Nature in her marvellous qualities;
A fascinating monster, fatal equally
In action or reaction of her love;
Fair flower of poisonous perfume born to kill.
Never the demon had an agency
Where he had nought to do in work that 's done.
Take pity on yourself, on me, on him— [*Aloud.*
On me, for you would hate me mortally
When once you were awaken'd from this dream,
To see the hideous monster you had made.
So utterly impossible this seems,
That I am prone to think it is a feint
To try my truth and prove my honesty.

PHRAXANOR

Ah! 'tis a feint that burns my body up,
And stirs my spirit like a raging sea.
Think you to pay in words?—deeds—deeds!
For I can tell you that you have in hand
One who will have no debts.

JOSEPH

It is enough.
'Tis time this hopeless contest had an end.
I have borne this besieging patiently,
Still hoping to arouse your modesty.
Oh! do not force the loathing that lies hid
Within my gall to rush into my face.

PHRAXANOR

This is the greatest blessing that you shun.

JOSEPH

Or the worst sin.

PHRAXANOR

Oh! weigh not with such scales.

JOSEPH

Oh! madam, have a care.

PHRAXANOR

Listen, or else
I'll set my little foot upon thy neck;—
Thou art like a beautiful and drowsy snake,
Cold, and inanimate, and coil'd around
Upon a bank of rarest sun-blown flowers.
My eye shall be the renovating sun——

JOSEPH

Madam, forbear: I'm sick to think on it.

PHRAXANOR

You overdo this art, for Nature sure
Never did put disgust upon a lip
So near a woman's: an empoison'd cup
Might curdle all the features of thy face;
But this same blandishment upon my brow
Could never chase the colour from thy cheeks.

JOSEPH

Love, being forc'd, so sickeneth the sense,
That dull monotony is nothing to it.—
A pallid appetite is sweeter far
Than shocked modesty and fierce distaste.

PHRAXANOR

You are too dead a weight.

JOSEPH

Why, let me go.

PHRAXANOR

My arms are faint ; smile thou, they're ribs of steel.

JOSEPH

The sun ne'er shinèd in a pitch-black night.

PHRAXANOR

Oh ! ignorant boy, it is the secret hour
The sun of love doth shine most goodly fair.
Contemptible darkness never yet did dull
The splendour of love's palpitating light.
At love's slight curtains, that are made of sighs,
Though e'er so dark, silence is seen to stand
Like to a flower closèd in the night ;
Or, like a lovely image drooping down
With its fair head aslant and finger rais'd,
And mutely on its shoulder slumbering.
Pulses do sound quick music in Love's ear,
And blended fragrance in his startled breath
Doth hang the hair with drops of magic dew.
All outward thoughts, all common circumstance,
Are buried in the dimple of his smile :
And the great city like a vision sails
From out the closing doors of the hush'd mind.
His heart strikes audibly against his ribs
As a dove's wing doth freak upon a cage,
Forcing the blood athro' the crampèd veins
Faster than dolphins do o'ershoot the tide
Cours'd by the yawning shark. Therefore I say
Night-blooming Ceres, and the star-flower sweet,
The honeysuckle, and the eglantine,
And the ring'd vinous tree that yields red wine,

Together with all intertwining flowers,
Are plants most fit to ramble o'er each other,
And form the bower of all-precious Love,
Shrouding the sun with fragrant bloom and leaves
From jealous interception of Love's gaze.—
This is Love's cabin in the light of day—
But oh! compare it not with the black night,—
Delay thou sun, and give me instant night—
Its soft, mysterious, and secret hours;
The whitest clouds are pillows to bright stars,
Ah! therefore shroud thine eyes.

JOSEPH

Madam, for shame!—

PHRAXANOR

Henceforth, I'll never knit with glossèd bone,
But interlace my fingers among thine,
And ravel them, and interlace again,
So that no work that 's done content the eye,
That I may never weary in my work.

JOSEPH

Would that my lord were come!

PHRAXANOR

Thy hair shall be
The silken trophy of the spirit of Love,
Where I will lap, fair chains, my wreathèd arms.

JOSEPH

What 's to be done? Madam, give way, I pray you.

PHRAXANOR

Beware! you'll crack my lace.

JOSEPH

You will be hurt.

PHRAXANOR

Oh! for some savage strength!

JOSEPH

Away! away!

PHRAXANOR

So, you are loose—I pray you kill me—do!

JOSEPH

Let me pass out at door.

PHRAXANOR

I have a mind
You shall at once walk with those honest limbs
Into your grave.

JOSEPH

Are you a lady, madam?

PHRAXANOR

I was so, but I am a dragon now:
My nostrils are stuff'd full of splenetive fire;
My tongue is turn'd into a furious sting,
With which I'll strike you—Ha! be sure I will.

JOSEPH

Madam, I did desire you no offence.

PHRAXANOR

Death and perdition, no!

JOSEPH

Your love is lost on me,
And I refus'd your offer; which was wise.

PHRAXANOR

Oh! was it so? have you so much scorn left?
Unload it in my lap—let me have all,
That I may hate with cause. Malice is proud,
Nor yields to trifles—nay, despise me more.

JOSEPH

I ne'er despis'd the lady of my lord,—
Only her vice.

PHRAXANOR

My lord—my lord—canst thou
Not mouth that word distinctly from my lady?
My lord!—He surely shall be paid full home
That honours lords above a lady's love.
Thou hast no lord but me,—I am thy lord:
And thou shalt find it, too—fool that I was
To stoop my stateliness to such a calf
Because he bore about a panther's hide.
That is not blood which fainteth in thy veins,
But only infant milk. Thou minion!
Bought up for drudgery with idle gold,
How dar'st thou look or wink thy traitorous eye,
Much less to think, when I command thy will?
Oh, impudence! to scorn a noble dame!
Were't not that royalty has kiss'd my hand
I'd surely strike thee.

JOSEPH

Madam! be temperate.

PHRAXANOR

Who bade thee speak, impudent slave? beware!
I'll have thee whipp'd.—Oh! I am mad to think
That ever I should bring myself to scorn
For such a stubborn minion as thou art.
Ha!—thou mere shadow—wretched atomy!—
Fill'd full of nothing—making a brave show,
Like to a robe blown with the boastful wind—
Thou worse than ice, for that melts to the sun—
Disgrace to Egypt and her feverish air—
Thou shalt not stay in Egypt.

JOSEPH

I grieve at that.

PHRAXANOR

I am chang'd. Thou shalt stay here—and since I see
There is no spirit of life in all this show,
Only a cheat unto the sanguine eye,
Thou shalt be given to the leech's hands
To study causes on thy bloodless heart
Why men should be like geese.—A pretty pass
I've brought my dauntless spirit to. These knees,
That ne'er did bend but to pluck suitors up,
And put them out of hope—Oh! I am mad—
These feet by common accident have trod
On better necks than e'er bow'd to the king;
And must I tie them in a band of list
Before a slave like thee?

JOSEPH

Still I look honestly.

PHRAXANOR

Thy looks are grievous liars, like my eyes;
They juggled me to think thou wert a man.
If seeming make men thou art one indeed.
Seeming, forsooth! Why, what hadst thou to do,
When thou might'st feast thy lips on my eyelids,
To hang thy head o'er thy left shoulder thus
(Like to a madman doting on a straw
Past the wide wonder of the precious world),
Blinking at Honesty, and so beguil'd
With its full semblance stuff'd with nothing real;
While I, like a congealèd icicle
Or some dull yew-tree brooding o'er a grave,
Was shunn'd avoidably?—Thou Honesty!
Like the arm'd tooth with the gilded snake,
Making its beauty fear'd and yet admir'd,
For that its poison is of precious use,
Thou that mak'st nothing of a dame like me,
Show me thy proper pet, that when one such
In all her soberness may meet my eye,
I may prepare to burn her with my gaze,
And twit her with my scorn.

JOSEPH

Honest women
Are made of tender stuff, and yet too tough
To warp or quail before the eye of vice.
Madam, have you no shame?

PHRAXANOR

Nor will not have:
When crownèd with success, shame laughs aloud;
When conquer'd, shame is of itself asham'd.
I am grown childish and inconsequent; [*Aside.*
Why, what have I to scan that 's critical?

My wounded spirit is benumb'd and bruis'd,
And seeks to lose itself in wandering.
I may be vanquish'd, but never will be weak.
Thou art not form'd to love, but ever to be lov'd.
[*Aloud.*

JOSEPH [*Aside.*

This fascinating danger walls me round,
Leaving no door that 's open to escape.
She's gone too far for one who ne'er recedes,
And her blind passion, as a torch illum'd,
Will ne'er recoil before explosion.
A single hope remains invisible,
A silken thread to carry all this weight.
Could I allume a virtuous fire in time,
We were all sav'd! Ah! feeble enterprise,
Dangerous as hopeless: Eloquence and Truth
Befriend me in this dire extremity!
'Tis true there is a common name call'd love;
[*Aloud.*
But love and love is union opposite,
Two flames of different colour and of heat,
One that consumes and one again that charms,
Pure element of continuity.
Fancy's inconstant idol still remains,—
All is not love in sensuality,—
A day's beginning and a month to end.

PHRAXANOR

Why, here is heyday logic! 'tis this hour
That I am born; through all my flowery youth
I have been following a miracle,
A solid, consequent, substantial dream;
Ha! ha! forgive me, Joseph, that I laugh;
Thou art the strangest nothing I e'er saw.

JOSEPH

As nothing, then, let me be entertain'd,
And leave me to my own oblivion.
Seeing that nothing can commit no sin,
Enough for me my insignificance.

PHRAXANOR

I am not curious, yet fain would catch
This light aerial exposition.

JOSEPH

And to what end? Alas! it were in vain;
In measure we advance our roads divide,
And only tend to the Antipodes.
Your soul and body own but one idea,
Nor mine: each tendance,—light and darkness dire!

PHRAXANOR

Now by all nature I *am* curious
Lest you suppose me taken in your net
Of phrases form'd of silken gossamer,
I pray you deign to aid my ignorance.

JOSEPH

The first great attribute is modesty,
Source of self-government and self-respect:
'Tis ever delicate—in giving all
Seems to give nothing, hence equality;
Consciousness absorb'd in sympathy
Is ever present abnegation,
And therefore generous in tenderness;
The fire that burns is intellectual,
So mind and body are combin'd in one—

Altar of constancy, high honour's throne,
Where reigns in confidence its lord elect.
This said, 'tis virtue,—all unsaid is vice,
Be it within or else without the laws;
The heart is not a gallery to hang
A line of portraits equal fair and false,
A gaudy history of sin and shame.

PHRAXANOR

Is there still more of this most precious woof?
The spinning out would take a summer's day.

JOSEPH

Yes, madam, there is more: still a last word
To waste like those that have preceded it,
One supreme thought that you have never had,
One that my courage fails me to divulge
Without your special approbation.

PHRAXANOR

Joseph lack courage?—Joseph's courage fail?
I of all beings cannot credit that;
But since you say in doleful verity
I am the source of this fine energy,
Not only I consent, but do command.

JOSEPH

Wedlock, altho' abandon'd and forgot,
Still lives in archives and in chronicles;
Word of reproach to all duplicity.
Why marry, being free? Is't that to-morrow
May mock to-day,—that the reputed son
Should shame the sire,—a living lie to all
Posterity,—inheriting the curse,
Dishonouring the line of ancestry?

Passion cosmopolite poisons the eye,
And demons pass for gods,—the vicious,
The vile, the abandon'd, and perchance *the slave!*
Depository of a glorious race,
There breathes not on the earth a nobler man
Than your large-hearted and confiding lord.
Think on your vows! Be constant and be wise!

PHRAXANOR

Well, have you ended? Is there nothing more?

JOSEPH

Or rather, madam, nothing has been said.

PHRAXANOR

Grace! Grace! You grow so dull and tedious
That if it were not for my traitorous eyes
You'd cure me of this passion thro' my ears.
Speak, and be brief.—

JOSEPH

There lacks equality:
If, madam, with a virgin heart you woo'd,
Unknowing all in native innocence,
Seeking a virgin heart to correspond,
Tho' somewhat bold, a fascination still
Might breed compassion, sympathy, and love
Wherein a shock'd imagination
Had neither rival nor co-partnership.
Yet you ask all; and think it much to give
(Enthron'd on your offended dignity)
A yet divided subdivided half,—
A soul beyond a body, if you will,
But rather say a soulless body's zest,—
A self-consuming sacrificing fire

Without an echo to its egotism—
(Still I insist there 's no equality)—
A flickering and vacillating flame,
Feeding the summer embers of the blood,
Where spring and autumn are alike unknown,
And winter waits with palsied icy hand,
Eager to gather up the parchèd bones,
And prematurely cast them to a grave
Where gapes eternity !——
I am not the senseless creature you suppose,
But stand upon my honour, and will have
Substance unshadow'd—either all or none.

PHRAXANOR

The great magician has laid by his wand,
The circle of his magic art is run.
Would you have my opinion of all this ?
'Tis—that we waste our time on idle words.
Oh ! I have been a fool to rave about—
I have mistook my passion all this while.
Thou implement of honesty, it is
Not scorn but laughter that is due to thee.
I'll keep thee as an antic, that when dull
Thou may'st kill heavy time.—Look up, thou slave :
A woman's pity lodges by remorse :
I never knew a danger I did fear.
Think'st thou that honesty will save thee now
From ignominious death ?

JOSEPH

God knows, not I ;
I never will be guilty of disgrace ;
If it do come, I'll bear it as I've borne
Your burthens ; sweat I may,—never complain.

PHRAXANOR

Dry as a wild boar's tongue in honesty—
And yet that hath an essence tending to
Its savage growth. Thou shock of beaten corn!
Thou hollow pit, lacking a goodly spring,
Tempting the thirsty soul to come and drink,
Then cheating him with dust and barrenness!
Thou laughable affectation of man's form!

JOSEPH

Madam, you beat the air; your sarcasm keen
Preceding your revenge touches me not;
Your wrath still glances o' the dangerous side,
And hits yourself.

PHRAXANOR

Are all these Canaanites
Like you? ha!

JOSEPH

An they were, 'twere no disgrace.

PHRAXANOR

I'll prick my arm, and they shall suck the blood,
To make men of them—for a need, I trow.
Ah! you poor temperate and drowsy drone—
You empty glass—you baulk to eyes, lips, hands—
Ha, ha! I will command the masons straight
Hew you in stone and set you on the gate,
Hard by the public walk where dames resort;
Therein you shall fool more admiring eyes
(A plague upon the embers in my throat),
For you fool'd mine, and I like company.
It is the proper stuff whereof you're made,

Your colour and your heat are counterfeit,
Like a stone image, fit to be admir'd,
But rather to be mock'd than to be lov'd—
There shall you stand, the mark of my contempt.

JOSEPH

You do me bitter wrong—unlady-like—
A scourgeable, a scarlet-hooded wrong,
When thus you pack my shoulders with your shame.

PHRAXANOR

Ha! have I touch'd thee? art thou sensible?
I prythee do not fret, my pretty lute;
I shall shed tears, sweet music, if thou fret.
Thou shalt be free, like a rare charmèd snake,
To range a woman's secret chamber thro'—
Here, take my mantle, gird it o'er thy loins,
And steep thy somewhat brownèd face in milk:
I have a sister, a young tender thing,
To her I will prefer thee, a she squire,
To brace her garments, and to bleach her back
With sweet of almonds. A dull parrot thou!
Tiring her idle ear, and gaping for
An almond for thy pains. May the huge snake
That worships on the Nile, enring and crush thee!

JOSEPH

This may be well, but it affects not me.

PHRAXANOR

Oh! madam, do not fret—madam, I say.

JOSEPH

Oh, peace! you pass all bounds of modesty.

PHRAXANOR

Pray write upon thy cap 'This is a man'—
A plague and the pink fever fall on thee!
I am thrown out: thou'st nettled me outright.—
Who knocks there? wait awhile, the door is fast—
Nay, stand thou here! I will not let thee pass.

Enter Attendant.

ATTENDANT

Madam, the noble Potiphar's returned.

JOSEPH

My business was to tell you of this thing,
But your great passion still o'erflooded it.

PHRAXANOR

I'm sick of two extremes, both desperate. [*Aside.*
Tameness doth lodge in dove-cots in a farm;
Spleen, with wild eagles, in the mountain pines.
I'll purchase nothing of this pale tameness:
I cannot sue again without disgrace.——
Yet I would sooner conquer on my knee
Than yield me with a crown upon my head
To the blank issue of my foil'd desire.
I am unus'd to this weak tenderness,
This soft return where folly mocks itself:
With closèd eyes I laugh myself to scorn,—
Open I dote past life's identity.
My passive blood springs sudden to my heart,
Seeking for Joseph in each burning vein.
Oh! dream personified of waking sleep,
Enchaining charm of body and of mind,
Breaking all bounds, flying to either pole,
Twining for ever in a circling spell,—

Ah! Joseph, all my fierce disgust lies dead:
At sight of thee I e'er return forlorn.
Oh, tyrant Love, thy tyranny is mine!
Bethink thee friend, be merciful in time, [*Aloud.*
Nor over cruel to thyself and me;—
The past shall fade,—memory expire in hope!
The spark still burns of all this mighty fire,
And love possesses me, that I have lov'd.
The setting sun with fiery galaxy
O'erfloods the fulgent west with dying gaze,
And still I yearn to bathe in such a light.
There is a second childhood in departing love,—
No tenderness so keen as that adieu;
The blood of Joseph ebbeth from my heart!—
My other self, if you will take my hand,
I'll whisper you hereafter.

JOSEPH

Madam, no!

PHRAXANOR

Oh! fool, you tie a stone about your neck,
And cross the yawning gulf upon a reed.
Hark! 'tis the main roars hoarsely underneath.
[*A pause.* PHRAXANOR *kneels to* JOSEPH *in apparent supplication.*

JOSEPH

Madam, for shame! Rise, I beseech thee, rise!
Kneel to thy husband, and I'll kneel to thee.
[*She springs to her feet.*

PHRAXANOR

By all our altars and their leaping flames,
The searching malice of our angry gods,

But I will be reveng'd upon thee, slave!
Could I have wrung from him a tardy 'yes' [*Aside.*
The echo of my laughter had been heard
Hence to the desert pyramids and back;
For now I loathe him in my inmost soul,—
The flame rejected by this wall of ice
Returns for ever to consume myself,
Withering in my own remorseful fire,
Baffled, besham'd, humiliated, lost;
But I will be reveng'd!——
This is a bitter silence for thee, slave! [*Aloud.*
My mind is active.

JOSEPH

Would your heart were so.

PHRAXANOR

My heart, that was so red, is black as night;
I muse on the unfathom'd mystery
Of the profound profoundest of the sea.
A dwelling of eternal solitude,
Confine of life, and realm of mute despair,
A spell ne'er broken, save by monsters dire,
Unknown to man's imagination,
Prowling the desert of this liquid world.
For combat or for prey such prison must
Be found out, or invented cunningly,
The measure of my hatred and revenge.
By what fierce means I'll drive thee to thy grave,
Or shroud thy life to come in misery,
I will not speak; so the discovery,
Being unsure, will work more bitterly.

JOSEPH

Oh! dangerous woman, where will all this end?

PHRAXANOR

Woman !—Woman to me !——
[*She loosens a little dagger at her waist.*
Assuredly I shall lay hands on you—
A common insult in a common name !
Sir, I am Phraxanor, of royal blood,
The beautiful, the courted, the ador'd,
Who, for the first and last time in her life,
Hath vail'd her pride before a slave.—Ha !
Woman !
A word thy blood shall wash away.—He comes !—
An empty urn followeth in his train,
Whereon is writ, in crimson characters,
' Joseph the Canaanite, the slave of slaves,
The vilest of this country and his own '.
He comes ! He comes ! my injuries rejoice !
I turn my back on thee as on the dead.

Enter POTIPHAR *and* Attendants.

PHRAXANOR

—Ah ! give me breath !

POTIPHAR

How fares it with my lady ?
Do you rather choose to strike your gentle breast
With violence than press that breast to mine ?

PHRAXANOR

You return merrily, my lord.

POTIPHAR

Why not ?
I urg'd my horses onward for thy sake.

PHRAXANOR

The bird doth whistle over hill and dale,
Leaving its roost for food and exercise,
And joyously it whistles back again;
But all its mirth is turned into a moan
When in its nest the weasel is espied
Sucking its speckled eggs.

POTIPHAR

Why, what is this?
Some witch, or some magician has been here.
Your speech is idle, but your look is fierce.—
How is this? Steward, is my household sound?
I will not ask, for never at thy hands
Have I found aught but equal justice yet,
Duty, and due respect. Embrace me, madam.

PHRAXANOR

Stand off! impurity doth 'witch my form,
Which blood must wash away. I'm haunted here
With a loose demon waiting to be chain'd.

POTIPHAR

What dost thou say?

PHRAXANOR

Listen. Stand forth, thou slave!—
Thou Hebrew bondman unto Potiphar,
I do forgive thee that thou ap'st the step
Of honesty, for thou hast frugal need
Of all the good belonging to thy soul,
And all the art that thou canst conjure up
To get thine evil drift accredited.

POTIPHAR

I hop'd to find a steward of good trust,
A wholesome household of good government,
And a fair wife content and unaggriev'd.
These things I left; but here, alas! I find
Some perilous rottenness instead of peace.

PHRAXANOR

Pray give me leave. Bondman, report thyself.
I do believe thy honesty so great
Unto this noble lord, thy master, here,
That of the stream of gold from the king's treasury,
Which thro' thy hands did course to other men's
Around the suburbs and the city mart,
No doit did ever stick unto thy palm
Tending to thy particular behoof;
Nor e'er did gild thy honest fingers more
Than in its passage through them; yea, I think
That thou hast prun'd his interest jealously,
Hast kept his cares still crouching at his feet,
And (rarity of servants) still hast made
His interest thine; and his fair name abroad
Hast dew'd as freshly as if all his shame
Should have been reap'd by thee. Is not this true?
I do believe it. Speak,—and nothing fear.

JOSEPH

This is a little—yet I do not see
Why you should wish to prattle of my good.

PHRAXANOR

Right—right.

JOSEPH

But since I have no cause to fear
Or any act or accident of mine,

My tongue shall show the record of my heart,
Just as my deeds did only want a name.
When I was brought a stranger to this land
And sold unto the chain of my dear lord,
Out of an honest bosom I besought
That in His mercy God would pity me,
And lift me up a little from the dust;
Whereat this Master of the universe
Did turn my lord's eye in his servant's face;
And he was pleas'd, and tied his trust on me,
E'en as a man descending in a pit
Doth brace his rope about the safest tree.
Fair trust begetteth confidence, for men
Do waste the precious treasures of the spring
Still looking onward to the spring to come:
Therefore my lord did hand me these his keys
That never yet had left his proper side.
And soundly slept upon my stewardship.
Nor ever yet hath act of mine arous'd
The peaceful slumber that he hath enjoy'd,
Nor spotted——

PHRAXANOR

You grow tedious; let me
Finish the goodly picture of your work.
Your trust was pure as silver, bright as flame,
Forg'd in your equity, fin'd in your truth,
Stubborn in honesty as stapled iron.
Your charity was wise, like soaking rain
That falleth in a famine on that ground
That hath the seed lock'd up—so far all honour:
Your love and duty to my lord were like
A mine of gold—but out, alas! the fault—
You fell in twain like to a rotten plank
When he was tempted in to trust his wealth—

There was no bottom to't, he broke his neck.
—Will *you* praise him, my honour'd lord ?

POTIPHAR

Why so ?

PHRAXANOR

Because he never must be prais'd again.
A howling dirge for ever in his ears
Buries this praise. Steward, give up thy keys.

JOSEPH

Obedience ever was my fault, my lord.
Here I do lay them at your gracious foot :
If I did e'er deserve to lose them thus,
May they fall unto chains and hug me round
Like some vile reptile crushing out my life !

PHRAXANOR

I have a mind to haul thee by the hair,
Singular idiot, that cannot fear—
My indignation, that should burn thee up,
Doth fall like fire on water. Tell me, thou slave,
Arise, and front my wrong'd nobility,
Nor slink in wonder on thy craven knees,
In what part of my body canst thou spy
The name impure ? wherein do I look false ?—
My lord—my lord—the man that you did love
Hath much abus'd me.

POTIPHAR

Ha !—if it be so——

PHRAXANOR

If !—

When Phraxanor has said there is no if.

Your doubt implied is all excusable,
And bred of his profound hypocrisy.
But hear us out: simplicity and truth
The steward knows command conviction.
Say I would change the vintage for the room,
Still in the passage I did find him there,
Like to a lobbied spaniel that mistakes
Some stranger for his owner; like that dog
He still would wind about my hasty step,
And feign as he would leap into my lap.
Whene'er I chanc'd to air me in the street,
Still was this steward going the same way.
Whene'er I call'd attendance from my slaves,
They were employ'd, and he straight started forth.
The chamber where you sleep he did invade,
But cries and threats yet held him in the slips
And scar'd his purpose from him.—If it be so!
Why on this spot, and at this very time
You take him laying shameful hands on me.

POTIPHAR

Wherefore did you not give him to the guard?

PHRAXANOR

Aye, there it is: his art and guile are such
(Being more dangerous because unknown)
That I dar'd trust my honour in no hand
But my dear lord's; and therefore I bore all
(Tho' somewhat ruffled) patient as I could.

POTIPHAR

So honest and so vile? This is most strange.

PHRAXANOR

Oh! not at all—no whit—'tis nothing strange.
The fox doth never steal into the fold

Till he hath forecast all his premises.
The thief that scorns your money and is bent
To crop the blossom of your secret peace,
Comes crown'd with flowers like May, as sweet as June,
And with a mask stolen from the wardrobe of
Fair honesty, and glean'd of other men.
He is the adder both in sight and touch—
Beautiful malice, glistening, deadly wretch,
I will example you: a man so acts
Fair with himself and fairer still to you:
He passes all his offices and trust,
And gleaneth honour in each enterprise.
This may not be all honour in the man;
Perchance his face is feign'd. He hath some end
Worth all his pains to him in answering.
Grant that a base man may live honestly;
Wherein detect him, and how find him out?
Why, when the secret end for which he works
Is laid unguarded 'fore his greedy eyes
He draws him to a point: and, let me ask,
Is not a woman mettle for this trail?
And does not all this pompous virtue blind
Her lord's keen eye, engaging hers the while
To lodge him in her thought for his behalf?
Am not I fair? is not the steward good?
Pleasing my lord with his fair services?—
My lord, away; the steward's goodness curds:
He casts lascivious eyes unto my bed;
Lays nets about my feet, stuns my sick ears
With protestations and beseechings, urg'd
With oaths enough to undermine a tower;
As tho' my lord were dead and in his grave,
Or loosely wiv'd.—Oh! it is very plain.
Marvel not I am so completely learn'd

In all the meanness of this vicious course;
I have had time to think upon the cause
Who bore the penalties.

POTIPHAR

Away! away!
Speak not unto me. Oh! thou shameful boy,
Were it not for the virtue of my wife
Thou hadst wrung my heart in grief, with less remorse
Than vultures draw the entrails of their prey.
Thou most ignoble boy! lowness, I see,
Be it e'er so cherish'd or exalted, will
Still turn to its own bias.—Wretched knave,
Thou dost abuse sweet nature in thy form;
Proficient in low craft, not honesty—
Artful deceiver to all good men's eyes—
Bred, none know where, 'mongst wretched villanies,
And nurtur'd by the worst of human kind.
Thy father surely was some ruffian knave——

JOSEPH

Cut me to pieces, or imprison me,
I will not say a word to grieve thine ear,
For I do love thee, sir, dear as my life—
But by the holy God who reigns above
I'll not stand tamely by, these arms unbound,
And hear my sire abus'd, for I love him
Dearer than the respect I owe to you.

PHRAXANOR

Ah! a filial virtue added to the rest.
Who was thy father, didst thou ever know?
Or dost mistake some honest man for him?

JOSEPH

A man who was a herdsman in the vales
Of gentle Canaan, full of woods and streams;
Who, thro' his industry and honest thrift,
Hath oxen, ploughs, and granaries, and tents,
Cattle, and bondmen, and a goodly flock
Of noble sons who honour his grey head;
Wherein he feels more happy than a king,
Ruling of love, not power.

PHRAXANOR

You were resolv'd,
Howe'er you love perfection in your sire,
To choose a certain and a sudden way
To find disgrace, and end your wretched life
Despis'd, unnoted, wicked, and forlorn.

JOSEPH

Madam, pray peace. Oh! is it not enough
That you do lead me in a silken string,
Like a young heifer to a sacrifice,
But you must goad my willingness along,
Not my delay?

PHRAXANOR

What means the slave? I trow
This is some cunning trick to wind about.
I do not think that any honest man
Could e'er be sire to one so base as thou.

JOSEPH

Still I am patient, tho' you're merciless.
Yet to speak out my mind, I do avouch
There is no city feast, nor city show,

The encampment of the king and soldiery,
Rejoicings, revelries, and victories,
Can equal the remembrance of my home
In visible imagination.
Even as he was I see my father now,
His grave and graceful head's benignity
Musing beyond the confines of this world,
His world within with all its mysteries.
What pompless majesty was in his mien,
An image of integrity creates,
Pattern of nature, in perfection.
Lo! in the morning when we issued forth,
The patriarch surrounded by his sons,
Girt round with looks of sweet obedience,
Each struggling who should honour him the most;
While from the wrinkles deep of many years,
Enfurrow'd smiles, like violets in snow,
Touch'd us with heat and melancholy cold,
Mingling our joy, with sorrow for his age:
There were my brothers, habited in skins;
Ten goodly men, myself, and a sweet youth
Too young to mix in anything but joy;
And in his hands each led a milk-white steer,
Hung o'er with roses, garlanded with flowers,
Laden with fragrant panniers of green boughs
Of bays and myrtle interleav'd with herbs,
Wherein was stor'd our country wine and fruit,
And bread with honey sweeten'd, and dried figs,
And pressèd curds, and choicest rarities,
Stores of the cheerless season of the year;
While at our sides the women of our tribe,
With pitchers on their heads, fill'd to the brim
With wine, and honey, and with smoking milk,
Made proud the black-ey'd heifers with the swell
Of the sweet anthem sung in plenty's praise.

Thus would we journey to the wilderness,
And fixing on some peak that did o'erlook
The spacious plains that lay display'd beneath,
Where we could see our cattle, like to specks
In the warm meads, browsing the juicy grass,
There pitch our tent, and feast, and revel out,—
The minutes flying faster than our feet
That vaulted nimbly to the pipe and voice,
Making fatigue more sweet by appetite.
There stood the graceful Reuben by my sire,
Piping a ditty, ardent as the sun,
And, like him, stealing renovation
Into the darkest corner of the soul,
And filling it with light. There, women group'd,
My sisters and their maids, with ears subdued,
With bosoms panting from the eager dance,
Against each other lean'd; as I have seen
A graceful tuft of lilies of the vale
Oppress'd with rain, upon each other bend,
While freshness has stol'n o'er them. Some way off
My brothers pitch'd the bar, or plough'd for fame,
Each two with their two heifers harness'd fast
Unto the shaft, and labour'd till the sweat
Had crept about them like a sudden thaw.
Anon they tied an eagle to a tree,
And strove at archery; or with a bear
Struggled for strength of limb. These were no slaves—
No villain's sons to rifle passengers.—
The sports being done, the winners claim'd the spoil:
Or hide, or feather, or renownèd bow,
Or spotted cow, or fleet and pamper'd horse.
And then my father bless'd us, and we sang

Our sweet way home again. Oft I have ach'd
In memory of these so precious hours,
And wept upon those keys that were my pride,
And soak'd my pillow thro' the heavy night.
Alas! God willing, I'll be patient yet.

PHRAXANOR

This must be seen to, it grows dangerous; [*Aside.*
The fool will steal away my husband's ears,
And mar my triumph. 'Tis a sweet report:
Thy kin, it seems, did never know of shame [*Aloud.*
Till thou didst earn it.

JOSEPH

Madam, did you speak?

PHRAXANOR

Dull minion! yes, I did. Thou hast the blot
Of all thy family: their infamy
Is thy sole portion, and thou bear'st it well.

JOSEPH

Vex me no more: I bend unto your wrench;
Pray you rest satisfied.

PHRAXANOR

How came it, sir,
Since you have gone so daintily about
That you were sold to our Egyptian whips,
Far from your boasted family and friends?
It argued not their love or deep regard
To covet coin before your company.—
Or were you, peradventure, stolen thence?

JOSEPH

Madam, to save a blush, I cannot lie.
My brothers sold me to the Midianites.

PHRAXANOR

Go to—whose fault was this ; or theirs, or thine ?

JOSEPH

Both theirs and mine, if I may judge aright.

PHRAXANOR

Ha ! have I track'd you ? Some foul practices,
Some evil, like this gross one of to-day,
Expell'd you forth of their fair company—
You did do vilely.

JOSEPH

No, upon my life.
Compassion, not reproof, is all that 's due
To me for this mischance.

PHRAXANOR

Humph !—I do fear it.

POTIPHAR

Ah, Joseph ! wherefore hast thou done this thing ?
My choler 's melted into burning tears
Which rise in sadness from my grievèd heart.
I had no children, and the love I bore
To thee was all paternal, and in spite
Of the unnatural wrong, I cannot wring
From out my bosom all the rooted love,
Lest it should leave a sore and dangerous wound
Too near my heart. What 's to become of thee ?

JOSEPH

No matter, my good lord; but talk not thus,
Or you will break my heart.

POTIPHAR

Oh! fie—fie—fie!—

JOSEPH

If I did ever wrong thee in an act,
In thought, or in imagination,
May I taste bread never again.—Oh! God!
Try me not thus: my infirmity is love.
I can be dumb and suffer, but must speak
When there 's a strife of love between two hearts.

PHRAXANOR

Ha! thou still wear'st thy heart upon thy tongue,
And paint'st the raven white with cunning words:
Slave, thou art over-bold, because thou think'st
The grossness of thine outrage seals my lips:
But thou shalt be deceiv'd; behold this chain:
Say, did it fall in twain of its own weight,
Or was it broken by thy violence?
Speak—liar! [*She plucks him by the beard.*

JOSEPH

Madam, try rather at my heart.

POTIPHAR

Phraxanor, you forget your dignity.

PHRAXANOR

My lord, my indented lips still taste of his.
Myrah, bring water here and wash my hand—
It is offended by this leprous slave.

Passion is privileg'd. Did you but feel
My wrong as it doth rankle in my breast
You'd cleave him to the girdle.

POTIPHAR

You shall have
Full justice for the injury, ne'er doubt.—
How durst thou do as thou hast been accus'd?

PHRAXANOR

Thou hast denied me: what hast thou to say?

POTIPHAR

And couldst thou deal so shamefully by me?

PHRAXANOR

Put him to that; aye, let him answer that.

JOSEPH

I'm like a simple dove within a net,—
The more I strive, the faster I am bound.
My wit is plain and straight, not crookèd craft;
The sight that reacheth heaven tires in a lane.

PHRAXANOR

You will not answer; 'tis the strangest knave
I ever met or heard of in my time:
His impudence downright amazes me.—
Slave! do you know you've given me the lie,
And laid my honour open to be scorn'd?
How long, I pray you, must I wait at hand
Till you will condescend to cast my crimes
And mar my honesty?

JOSEPH

The truth is this:
The character my lady hath bestow'd

Is borrow'd of herself and fix'd on me
To feed her disappointment and revenge.
She would have tempted me, but I refus'd
To heap up shame on my so honour'd lord.

PHRAXANOR

Ha, ha!—there is your steward, honour'd lord—
His master-piece of wit is shown at last.
Ha, ha!—I pray you now take no offence,
But let him go, and slip your slight revenge.
Now that the man is known I have no fear.
Thus cunning ever spoileth its own batch—
Doth it not, steward? Hold him still in trust—
But for this fault he were a worthy man.
I take my leave, my lord, and shall retire:
You'll find me in my chamber: linger not,
Unless your company should charm your stay,
Which I shall take unkind. Steward, farewell;
For ever fare you well; and learn this truth—
When women are dispos'd to wish you well
Do not you trespass on their courtesy,
Lest in their deep resentment you lie drown'd,
As now you do in mine. I leave you, sir,
Without a single comfort in the world. [*Exit.*

JOSEPH

God is in heaven, madam! with your leave.

POTIPHAR

I have a mind to cut thee all to pieces——

JOSEPH

Patience, dear lord; thou wilt repent my blood.

POTIPHAR

Or tear thee limb from limb, and strew thy bones
About the walk where executions are

Done in the city. Hark! sweet mercy's gate
Now jarreth in my breast to shut thee out,
A stranger thence for ever. Thou heldst my heart
In trust, but I am glad to find it is
Mine own again, since thou'dst have broken it.
For thy sake I will never trust to man,
Believe in gentle eyes, or honest brows,
Or years of service. If it please thine ear
(As being thy work of wit perchance it may)
Know thou hast broke my faith with the fair world,
And turn'd my eyes suspiciously upon
Most honest men: and ever from this hour
I do divorce thee, with the rest of men,
From my sore bosom,—looking upon all
As they did watch the moment to betray;
For I did right, yet wrong, in trusting thee.—
Go to thy dungeon, go. [*Exit.*

JOSEPH

Ah! go thy ways.—
The love I bear thee, noble Potiphar,
And loss of thine, doth grieve me far beyond
This woman's witchcraft and my own disgrace.—
Come, put me underground: though not quite dead,
For hope and patience keep me company.
[*Exit guarded.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT

ACT III

Scene I.—*In a Prison.*

Enter Joseph.

Joseph

There ever is a good side to be found
Even in a man's bad fortune: for that I,
Who am a prisoner and in disgrace,
Do keep the keys, and am the gaoler here,
Warder to mine own liberty and ease.
Integrity surmounteth accident;
Its grief is pure, and mix'd with charity,
Feeling for others more than for itself.
In this invisible armour men may stand
Within the grasp of danger and of death,
And from the profound bottom of the heart
Cry out content.—My lord's fair lady now,
With eyes as quick to trammel as betray,
Hath set her spell upon some other brow.—
I, guiltless, suffer; she triumphs guiltily:
Therein I am happy, fortunate, and glad.
I am condemn'd unjustly by my lord;
But I, thank God, do know my innocence,
And therein am I happy and content.
I rise with Heaven, although I fall with man.
Like music at a death, there is sweet pain
Within the core of griefs, however sad;
For retrospection is a precious shade,

And God hath taught us there are better things
Than any we can wail. That man rejects,
And casts his fortune in an ignorant grave,
Who thrusts his passion past his patience.
Learn to fear God, love honesty, and thrive—
Oh, there is physic in our injuries!
A crown angelic, mix'd in mortal thorns!
Say that you love some lady in her bloom,
And she hath set her heart another way,—
Still you do love yourself that you did love,
And count your riches by your precious loss;
And though you balm her memory with your tears,
It is a blessing that you still can weep,
And be enamour'd of ripe sufferance.—
Say that some man hath got a noble heart
Tied to the wheel whereon the nation works;
(Such slips there are, and such will ever be)—
And say that wheel doth work a jealous round,
Having no circle for the general good,
But the particular behoof alone
Of power abus'd, of grandeur, and renown;
Why such a ruddy heart must bear the strain,
Living on thought instead of action:
And it is true, that they do never break,
But, spite of pain, continual and severe,
Nourish them proudly, and do hug their griefs,
With wonderful affection to the end.
What sire hath lost his son, or son his sire,
But time hath made his grief a holy joy?
That which we lose, we mourn, but must rejoice
That we have ever had. Wise Providence
Doth star and split our sorrows severally,
So that we may not fall into despair.
If that the son be vicious, it is well
That a vile course hath had a speedy end,—

If virtuous, it is a balm that flows
Athrough the sorrow of the time to come.
I grieve that I have lost my father's house;
But how I joy to weep and think of him!
I grieve to think upon my brothers' sin;
But I do love my brothers past their sin.—
Look up, you men, in poverty and grief:
Weigh your deserts, amend the rottenness,
And all the goodness nourish in the sun:
Look out upon the world, and bow to Heaven,
And take your stand as you did mean to run
A true and prosperous race.—Remorseless men
Are neither fit to live nor fit to die;—
All others are within the pale of hope,
And cheerfulness and honesty will soon
Lead them to love long life, and love themselves
For virtue's sake.—What, ho! there—up—arise!

Enter Chief Butler *and* Chief Baker.

CHIEF BUTLER

Good morrow, Joseph.

CHIEF BAKER

Why should we up? why rise?

JOSEPH

Because the sun doth through the grating peer,
And on its beams ride hopes of better days.
The eye of God so sphereth round the world,
And penetrates to palaces and cells.

CHIEF BAKER

And you are merry that you see the sun
Which is shut from you!—Would that my conceits

Were fantasied like yours,—then any straw
Would serve for laughter and encourage hope.

JOSEPH

Come—come—you are too dull—churlishly given.

CHIEF BAKER

Aye—I am given to a dungeon cell,
And, wonderful to you, do not rejoice.

JOSEPH

And do you mumble o'er your just deserts ?
What would you have ? You pass from day to day
In sloth and idleness, which you do love ;—
Were you sent forth to grind the public corn,
To split with wedges stubborn-grainèd wood,
Or task'd to some laborious exercise,
You then would loathe that life, and groan for this
As a sweet pleasure and desir'd retreat.—
Oh ! you do bear a poison in your mind
That would not let you rest in Paradise.
Your discontent doth go a tortoise pace
And travels as it sleeps.—For shame—for shame !—
Have you done evil, swervèd from the man ?
And will you sink yourself below the beast,
And howl upon your fitting punishment ?
Pray you conceive a sober, thoughtful life
Is better worth than folly's restless round.
Make of your mind a world wherein to dwell ;
Your independence then is proof and wise ;
And sweet content may mock these rusty keys.—

CHIEF BAKER

I marvel much that, being a prisoner,
You keep the keys and yet respect the bolts,
The means that lock you from your liberty.

JOSEPH

Because mine honesty is greater far
Than love of liberty. Though I were sure
That I should linger here till old and grey,
I would not break my trust or fly my fate.
The first is mean, and robs men of content;
The last is cowardly, and lacking power.

CHIEF BAKER

Lend me the keys; I'd answer thy rebuke
With opposite action.

JOSEPH

No, stay here and mend.—
How is it you do look so sad to-day?

CHIEF BUTLER

I dream'd a dream, and it doth make me sad.
Like to a thistle in the autumn wind,
Each breath that smells of winter makes me shake,
And robs me of some down. That which doth touch
My estate, doth fright it; and this subtle dream
Hath struck me like to news that 's suddenly brought
To one condemn'd to die—all hope—all fear—
And yet more fear than hope; for he more fears
To die, than he did ever love to live:—
So fares it with my hopes of liberty:
I do more fear to stay within this place,
Than I shall love my liberty without.

JOSEPH

Tell me thy dream. Great God doth often show
The secret path to good by such small means,

Advancing so His majesty on fate,
That men are masters of their destiny.
A thing like this might save a sinking world.
Whatever matters press against the heart,
Though e'er so little in thy judgment's eye,
Give them a sober ear. No good man's heart
Did ever yet betray him, nor prove false
To its possessor. Cunning, and craft, and guile,
Malice, and thirst of blood, and every ill,
Do emanate from passion and the head—
Passion, that walks the ward 'twixt heart and brain,
Like to a mutinuous captain arm'd in wrath.
True hearts do never mix but in things good,
And are benumb'd, insensible, and cold
With any who do practise in foul vice;
Therefore obey its feelings and discuss them:
For human nature hath a curious way
In answering ends divine. Tell me thy dream—
I hope it tendeth to thy better cheer,
For I do love thee well.

CHIEF BULTER

Joseph, give ear!
Lo! as I stood upon the barren ground
A vine crept suddenly from out the earth,
And into three fair branches spread itself,
And, climbing up, it did enrobe itself
In leaves and tendrils of the palest green.
And gradually they chequer'd o'er in hue
Of sodden yellow, and the hanging grapes,
That were as small and green as early tares,
Did swell and pulp them to a luscious round,
Lavish in purple richness; over-bloom'd
With fragrant dust, as blue as plums in June—
And lo! within my hand there was a cup,

And I did pluck a heavy bunch of grapes,
And forthwith press'd them into Pharaoh's cup—
And gave him, and he drank.

JOSEPH

Glory to God!
Lo, you—I will unravel this your dream,
And glad your ears, and renovate your heart:—
The branches of the tree are three full days.
Within that time shall Pharaoh raise thine head,
And thou again shalt fill thy former place,
And hand his cup, and have thy stewardship.
Now when thou standest at great Pharaoh's side
I prythee think on him thou leav'st behind;
Make mention of me unto Pharaoh's ear:
Do not forget our bondage, in that hour;
Seek thou to do me good, and speak me fair,
For truly I am guiltless of the crime
For which I suffer this imprisonment.
A tissue of misfortunes is my life:
Stolen from my father in the Hebrew land
And sold into this country for hard coin,
I have no friend to help me,—only God
To speak to me, or listen to my griefs;
Wherefore that man who works me any good,
Doth hate my evil fortune, and I love
Him like a brother.—So remember me.

CHIEF BAKER

The dream is good, and wisely it is solv'd.—
I too have dream'd my dream: the while I stood,
Three baskets white were balanc'd on my head;
The third being fill'd with meats of every kind,
Even such as Pharaoh's table us'd to bear;

And presently the wild birds did descend
And eat from out thereof.

JOSEPH

Thy dream too hath
A mark'd interpretation—heavy doom!
The baskets are three days: in three days' space,
At Pharaoh's high command, thou shalt be hang'd
Upon a tree, where birds shall eat thy flesh.—
Good and bad fortune thus on either side
Teach me some gladness, that I'm not the last:
Leaving me hope that I may win the first—
Between them lies content.

SCENE II.—*Pharaoh's Palace.*

Enter PHARAOH, Officer, Attendants, *and* Guards.

PHARAOH

These dreams do trouble me past sufferance:
Something most earnestly they do portend;
My spirit is perplex'd, yet dull as lead.—
Tedious anxiety and doubt, I see,
Bear no respect to kings.

OFFICER

The magi all, as knowing your desire,
Are working at the scroll, and tracing out
By mysteries and crookèd subtleties
The meaning of this visitation.—
See where they come, but by their faces seem
As if their divination was at fault,
Or find it dangerous.—

Enter Magicians.

PHARAOH

Now then, unfold
Briefly and plain your knowledge in mine ear;
For I am anxious, nor can brook delay—
Pharaoh commands!

FIRST MAGICIAN

All honour to the king!—
The air of magic and the course of art
Have run their circle: but we cannot find
Within the mystic letters of our book
An answer to thy dream.

PHARAOH

Fie on your beards!—
Fie on your gravity and silent lives,
Your figur'd robes, and antic mummery!—
I'll never trust you more.—What is all this?
You tell me 'tis your office to divine,
And, when I put a question of some pith,
Like stammering urchins cry, 'We do not know—
We cannot tell, it is not in the book'.—
Fie on it all! your craft is but abuse,
Or you disgrace it in your ignorance.—

SECOND MAGICIAN

My lord the king doth judge his servants hardly.

PHARAOH

Go—go—I do bespeak you very truly.—
What can I do? How shall I know this thing?—
Without the knowledge I shall never rest—

Yet where to gather it? Now, by my sword,
I'd hold that man as dearly as my crown
That could unfold me this perplexity.
I would exalt him, and would make him feel
What generosity a king can pay
To those whose wisdom teach him patience.

CHIEF BUTLER

Pardon thy servant that he speaks unask'd.
I do remember me of heavy faults.
The chief of Pharaoh's bakers and myself
Did grievously offend our lord the king,
And in his justice he imprison'd us:
We each did dream a dream: there was a man,
A Hebrew youth, imprison'd in that ward;
To him we told our dreams, and he did straight
Divine them by interpretation,—
And as he did interpret, so the fact
Did come to pass.

PHARAOH

Swift! swift! and fetch this man.—
The sweetest honey liveth in the weed;
And boastless wisdom often may be found
Where magic never came. Eager desire
Scorns nicety of means. The invisible winds
Do fly our heavy sails; and this proud pearl
Grew of the dullest fish of all the sea;
Great mountains may be hid within a vale;
And waking men yet stumble upon fate.
A drowning man did never scorn a straw;
And I, a king, do catch at this small thread.—
Go some, and bid them haste.—Magicians, hear!
You that are like the image by the fount
Where water poureth from the gaping mouth,—

So fluent wisdom should stream forth of yours.—
How is it, being a king, that I have aches ?—
How is it, being a king, that I must die ?—
Since wisdom is your craft, we'll settle first
A simple truth that I have learn'd myself:
No man was ever great in wisdom yet
(For cunning is but as a rotten bridge)
That was not greater in his honesty.

FIRST MAGICIAN

Kings are kings over men:
Nature, a king o'er kings.

PHARAOH

Oh, mince it not!—
I am in mind to hear the truth to-day.
We are the golden mockeries of our age,
And time doth look on us as other specks,
Filling a common space in stately tombs;
And as a spirit hovering in the air
Through space doth muse upon our mortal acts
(Who, if the crown be off, knows not the king
From any officer), so future time
Doth look on us, or sees us not at all.
What is the greatest virtue of a king ?

SECOND MAGICIAN

Justice.

THIRD MAGICIAN

Mercy.

FIRST MAGICIAN

Humility.

PHARAOH

The last is best.—
'Tis better governing the hearts of men
Than their sick brains.

MAGICIANS

My lord bespeaks him wise.

PHARAOH

No, I have not humility enough.
I had much rather to be fed on quince
Than flatterèd, for I have been betray'd.
Your garments are your traitors, sages hoar:—
How gravity doth cover ignorance!
It were a crime in any meaner man
To think thee fool, because thy seeming's wise;
And yet my dream is scarcely cold, and thou
Canst not unlace it in thy proper craft.
Nay, do not wince, dost thou expect to find
Flatterers in kings? Be wise—and love the truth
Though it should lay thee open to the laugh;
For laughter is but second unto truth.—
Say you,—humility doth take no towers;
It is the loveliest thing to give to friends,
But tames no dangers or fierce enemies.
How then am I, being a royal king,
Open to knives, besiegings, and attacks,
To wear thy cloak of sweet humility?—
When power confronts it, as it ever will,
It in its own example perisheth.

MAGICIAN

It hath the art, my lord, to love itself
By loving every other thing that's good.

Humility, great king! hath other names:
Its own is all angelical. On earth
It takes those names that ape the angel still.
In war it is call'd mercy; and in peace
Its proper self.—In both 'tis a fix'd will,
A soul of high resolve to put away
All spots which chequer truth. 'Tis pure from passion,
O'erflows of love and sympathy for good,—
Its modesty admits no precedence,
And groweth from the boundless truth within;
Its justice weeps at its own punishments.
Its power is fortitude; its will, offence
To every evil gnawing at the world.
It is the greatest virtue in a king,
Therefore, for Egypt's good, encourage it!

Enter JOSEPH.

PHARAOH

How now?—the man—we'll talk of this again,—
His presence likes me.—Hebrew, I am told
That divination and unfoldings wise,
Spite of thy youth, do wait upon thy tongue.

JOSEPH

'Tis not in me: and yet let Pharaoh speak;—
A peaceful answer God will give the king.

PHARAOH

Lo! as I dream'd, I stood upon a bank:
Out from a river that did wash my feet
There did arise seven kine, all fat of flesh,
And in the meadow straight they took to feed;
And then behold seven other kine came up,

Unlike the first, wither'd, and lean, and poor,
So wretched, that I never saw the like
In all the land of Egypt till that time.
Behold, the last did swallow up the first;
Yet no man should have known it, for they still
Were lean and empty, hollow as before.
Then I awoke.—And lo! I dream'd again!
And seven ears did rise up from the ground,
All full of corn, and ripe, and fit to glean;
And seven others rose up after them,
Husky and poor, and blighted by the wind;
And those thin ears devourèd up the first,
Yet show'd no signs of fatness. This I told
To sages and magicians; but none such
Can solve the meaning: if thou canst do so,
Great thy reward at Pharaoh's hand!

JOSEPH

Oh king,
The Lord herein shows Pharaoh His intent.
Thy dreams are one.—The seven wholesome kine
Are seven years: the seven wholesome ears
Are seven years: behold the dreams are one.
And the ill-favour'd seven fleshless kine
Are seven years,—the seven blasted ears
Are still the same; and they shall surely be
Seven years of famine. Lo! thy dreams are told,
And it will even be as I have said.
And God is willing Pharaoh shall foreknow,
For seven years the fields shall yield forth grain
In such abundance as was never known;
And after that for seven years the ground,
Sterile and arid, shall not bear a blade;
And famine shall go out through all the land,
And plenty be forgot; and grievous want

Hide in the hollow cheeks of famish'd men.
And, for thy dream was doubled unto thee,
God has establish'd it shall shortly be.
Therefore the king shall cull out some wise man
And set him over Egypt at this time,
And cause his officers to follow him ;—
And they shall gather up from out the land
The fifth part of its harvest from this waste
And fruitful produce that will soon ensue.
This shall they do through each of seven years,
And garner it, and hoard it in the sheds ;
And when the seven years of famine come,
Then shall it be as precious as man's life ;
And Egypt's king shall live, and all the land ;
Nor shall they perish in the general want.
This is the truth, oh king !

PHARAOH

Wisdom I see
Has left our graver beards, and taken covert
In the tongue of youth. Where is a man like this
In whom the spirit supreme speaks audibly ?
I promis'd largely to the man who should
Interpret this my dream, and all shall see
I will redeem my word. Hebrew, 'tis strange
Thy wisdom never yet did reach our ears.

JOSEPH

Like the sea beast, the huge Leviathan,
Truth often swims at bottom of the world,
While dolphins play above his grainèd back :
So men o'erfigure truth.—The word of God
Worketh its secret way, and needs no help.
Like to a jewel (hid in desert sands),
Of wondrous lustre, as creation old,

That finds its way into a nation's eye—
A matchless excellence of priceless worth—
So precious truth doth jewel the fair world,
Or, buried, sleeps unnoted but of God.

PHARAOH

Since thou foreknowest all this secret truth
None is so fit or worthy as thyself
To govern in the land. Over my house
Thou shalt be ruler; as thou seest good.
All men shall bow, and only in the Throne
Will I be greater than thyself. This ring
I strip from mine to grace thine honour'd hand,
In token that all Egypt may behold
How dear is honesty unto the king,—
How precious wisdom!—You do not rejoice
Like one, methinks, so fortunate as you.
I see you do not guess I meditate,
If grief or care have rudely troubled you,
Or that injustice or harsh cruelty
Have meddled with your peace, yourself shall sit,
Judgment pronounce, and punishment award.

JOSEPH

Ah, far from me resentment and revenge,
Returning injuries for benefits!
Provided that the king hath confidence
In his poor servant's just integrity,
Or praise or blame is but indifferent.

PHARAOH

Close to my own apartment see him lodg'd,
In the same palace, under my own eye!

SCENE III.—*Another part of Pharaoh's Palace.*

Enter two Officers *and* Magicians, *severally.*

FIRST OFFICER

Oh, 'twas a sight! These sinuous arms of mine
Would never let me 'plaud an idle show;
And I have never slept a sleep so sound
As after battle with marauders fierce
In hoary wilderness or mountain cave:—
And yet I swear I sooner would peruse
A sight like this, than my own scorèd front,
Its gory honours in the plate of steel
Reflected of a newly vanquish'd foe.

SECOND OFFICER

Ne'er did my eyes take in so brave a sight!—
Cloths of all hues, velvets, and softer silks,
Like argent skirted as the frizèd waves,—
Colours bright-glowing, harness of beaten gold,
And splendid tissue vying with the sun,
Who, as though vex'd with envy, shot his fire
In ardent scorn, o'er-gilding all the host.

FIRST MAGICIAN

I pray thee, what was this?

SECOND OFFICER

The walls did groan.
The trees did bear more men than ever fruit.
No dangerous edge, but like a swallow perch'd,
Some rough Egyptian through his straining eyes
(Much like a hungry beggar at a feast)
Suck'd in magnificence.—Plenitude fed desire:

Appetite crav'd past both. No man did know
That was his house, for still it was o'errun
By general feet; all vacancies chok'd up.
Three parts o' the city emptied the livers out
And chok'd the fourth. It were an easy thing
For twenty men-at-arms to sack the thirds,
And take the other gazing. Age, youth, brown, fair,
Were heap'd-up spoils to wonder; faces were
Like stampèd coin, huddled in heaps to pay
A tribute to the sight.—There was a buzz
Vexing the passing breeze, much like to that
Whenas a man doth put his wary ear
Close to a hive of bees; and then a shout
That made old soldiers redden as they look'd
Into each other's thoughts.—Oh, it was rare!

SECOND MAGICIAN

This new-found Joseph's triumph, I suppose.

FIRST MAGICIAN

Such boisterous clamour, and such throngèd joy,
Is violent waste of human action.
The clouds do ever mock the bravest show.
Splendour and glory are but folly cloak'd:
Wonder is ignorance; pomp, bright deceit;
Nightfall extinguisheth the garish show,
And then the man must think. But some there are
Whose mealy brains will sleep upon the fret,
And e'en be dazzled with it for a week,
As though the head were stuff'd with barrèd wheels,
Brightly revolving in contrarious ways.—
I have no patient ear to taste such trash.

First Officer

A sneap,—a sneap,—carry your inky brow
And cloudy eye to those who love your caves,
Your nightly lamps, your silence, and your scrolls.
This your contempt is foolish, and not wise.
Come, come, I'll go about with you for this—
Your wisdom's like a giant of report,
That may be heard and yet is never seen:
Sometimes for proof you show his heavy club,
His bulky garments, or his sandal old;
And map the hollow rock where he abides.
Just such an antic game your gravity
Plays off upon the ignorance of men.
Folly's allowance is the stock he owns:
For so much wisdom he accredits you;
The odds were ten to one between the two
The man is fool'd. We that are men of life,
Whose blood is purple with the lusty grape,
And purgèd with the scymitars of foes,
Have sharper wits, and travel and observe.
I can perceive some glimpse of wisdom in you,
Yet not so much as you pretend to own;
Therefore your habit and your craft's a cheat.
Then what a monstrous man are you to rail
Upon this kingly festival to-day,
Because 'tis like your own deceit, and plays
On man's imagination!—I perceive
You gravity is envious.—Go to—
'Tis not the show you hate,—it is the man,
Whose youthful wisdom and diviner sense
Have pluck'd your mantles up, and shown the hoof.
Why, man, by such a practice as this same,
You bray upon your own absurdity.

He who acknowledgeth a man that 's wise,
Is counted wise in the acknowledgement:
He 'scapeth ridicule, and balms his name,
Though he do break his gall. If you will stay
And hear me prate a little on this show,
Then I may think you flatter not yourself:
If not, choke on your prejudice.

First Magician

Not I.—
I've sometimes heard how kings have been deceiv'd:
Things that are easy said are hard to prove,
And craft can shape event to circumstance,
Though circumstance may shame it in event.
You of the sword oft make a gaudy cloak
Stand for the captain, who at issue fails.

First Officer

Yea, many a coat is many an officer;
Like a tame leopard that doth lick his pride,
Which is his tawny and bespotted skin,—
Thus men of blood and men of supine thought
Do meet as brother fools when they pretend
To undeservèd knowledge, or to fame.
I do not tell you not to wear your cloak,
For man is faulty in convictions;
But I do tell you not to lay the blame
On others' folly till you purge your own.
And so, great type of wisdom, fare ye well.
[*Exeunt* Magicians.

Second Officer

'Faith, you have given his gravity a wrench.

First Officer

Oh! hang a fellow with a curlèd lip,
Whose modish form and blank morality
Do med'cine to his spleen and crouching pride!
These magi are a double-dealing race.

Second Officer

Ha! What twin riders have just pass'd the gate?
Their horses' nimble heels do beat and bound
Fast as a ball that chafes towards the bourne.

First Officer

This way they scour abreast, as they did think
Lightning was in the wind which they have left.
[*Enter two* Egyptians.
What, Pharaoh's page, and not at court to-day?

First Egyptian

Is the scene over?

Second Egyptian

Has the procession pass'd?

First Officer

The sun is all the glory of to-day
That you are like to see. It is all done.

Second Egyptian

I'm like to one who 's dropp'd a precious rose
Which the smooth tide did give me hope to get;
I barely touch it with my fingers' ends
And then it sinks; so time hath hurried on
This goodly show, for which my great desire
Has almost crack'd my breath.

FIRST EGYPTIAN

Tell us, I pray,
What fortune we have miss'd.

SECOND OFFICER

Why, sir, this much:
Fancy you see all stuck together close
As many people as a dream would hold:
Then, sir, you have a multitude as thick
As flies on luscious honey newly spilt;
All passive, downward, active at the head—
Behold observers.—In the royal path
Came maidens rob'd in white, enchain'd in flowers,
Sweeping the ground with incense-scented palms:
Then came the sweetest voices of the land,
And cried, 'Bow ye the knee!'—and then aloud
Clarions and trumpets broke forth in the air:
After a multitude of men-at-arms,
Of priests, of officers, and horsèd chiefs,
Came the benignant Pharaoh, whose great pride
Was buried in his smile. I did but glimpse
His car, for 'twas of burnish'd gold. No eye
Save that of eagles could confront the blaze
That seem'd to burn the air, unless it fell
Either on sapphire or carbuncle huge
That riveted the weight. This car was drawn
By twelve jet horses, being four abreast,
And pied in their own foam. Within the car
Sat Pharaoh, whose bare head was girt around
By a crown of iron; and his sable hair,
Like strakey as a mane, fell where it would,
And somewhat hid his glossy sun-brent neck
And carcanet of precious sardonyx.
His jewell'd armlets, weighty as a sword,

Clasp'd his brown naked arms—a crimson robe,
Deep edg'd with silver, and with golden thread,
Upon a bear-skin kirtle deeply blush'd,
Whose broad resplendent braid and shield-like clasps
Were boss'd with diamonds large, by rubies fir'd,
Like beauty's eye in rage, or roses white
Lit by the glowing red. Beside him lay
A bunch of poppied corn; and at his feet
A tamèd lion as his footstool crouch'd.
Cas'd o'er in burnish'd plates I, hors'd, did bear
A snow-white eagle on a silver shaft,
From whence great Pharaoh's royal banner stream'd,
An emblem of his might and dignity;
And as the minstrelsy burst clanging forth,
With shouts that broke like thunder from the host,
The royal bird with kindred pride of power
Flew up the measure of his silken cord,
And arch'd his cloud-like wings as he would mount,
And babble of this glory to the sun.
Then follow'd Joseph in a silver car,
Drawn by eight horses, white as evening clouds:
His feet were resting upon Pharaoh's sword;
And on his head a crown of drooping corn
Mock'd that of Ceres in high holiday.
His robes were simple, but were full of grace,
And (out of love and truth I speak him thus)
I never did behold a man less proud,
More dignified or grateful to admire.
His honours nothing teas'd him from himself;
And he but fill'd his fortunes like a man
Who did intend to honour them as much
As they could honour him.

First Egyptian

Why, this was rare.

Second Officer

Then came the honour'd elders of the land,
Whose sombre habits answer'd to their age,
Wove of the ancient woof which sibyls love;—
Their faces as old chronicles were mapp'd
And furrow'd with an age of mystic thought;
Their snowy hair that mingled with their beards
Flow'd o'er their shadowy forms in many a fold,
Covering their garments like a silvery cloud
At moonlight o'er some darksome sepulchre;
Following the gorgeousness that went before,
Thus they crept on as night succeeds the day:
In their right hand they bore a charmèd wand,
And in their left a dusky scroll o'erwrought
With hieroglyphics and deep mysteries:
Each one was follow'd by his sacred charge,
In silver cradles work'd with lotus flowers,
Wherein were shrin'd with reverential awe
Emblems of Egypt since her antique days
(As on her brazen pillars it is writ)
Coeval with creation's misty age,—
Those venerated old and mystic forms,
Sacred receptacles of Egypt's faith:
Then came devices work'd in various ways
That a fantastic fancy could invent,—
The crocodile and serpents of the Nile
Mail'd doubly in resplendent jewelry,
And chain'd with chains of gold.

First Egyptian

I've travell'd much and many countries seen,
Frozen and arid, where whole nations swarm'd

E'en as they do to build our monuments,
Witness'd the crowning of most potent kings,
Their advent and their inhumation;
But this in gorgeous taste elaborate
Surpasses all;—more! more! I thirst to hear!

SECOND OFFICER

But the chief sight, and far beyond the rest,
Was a vast platform ample as a town,
Wherein by matchless craftsmen had been set
A thousand springs:—and on as many wheels
It rollèd not, but glided undulant,
So that no shock could jar its precious freight,
Drawn by some hundred trainèd elephants
All hous'd in velvet and in cloth of gold,
And on it was bestow'd with wondrous art
Forest and rocky fastness, wood and glen,
Peopled with all that nature could bestow
Of savage beauty, beast or bird or fish.
Behold a mimic Nile appear'd to flow
From end to end, and its inhabitants
By snare or force from out the parent flood,
Monster or reptile, had been gather'd here;—
Their keepers, habited in caney sedge,
Diff'ring but little from their dang'rous charge,
With chain and club still kept a wary eye,—
While on an elevated stand a troop
Of chosen archers with a single aim
Stood ready, with a hundred arrows drawn,
To strike all danger with a sudden death.
Huge serpents wound about the sapling trees,
While others, charm'd, wander'd at liberty,
Or undulating in their graceful folds,
Follow'd a shepherd with his reedy pipe,
Proud of their tam'd and willing servitude,

Mark'd by the jewell'd collar round their necks.
Here plaintive syrens in their crystal caves,
With star-flower crowns and lotus garland tress'd
In their down-flowing and enrobing hair,—
There fabled men and women of the deep,
Deck'd in the secret treasures of the sea.
The mountains had been robb'd, the eagle's home
Rifled, and pillag'd was the vulture's hold.
The supple panther and white elephant,
The hoary lion with his ivory fangs,
The barrèd tiger with his savage eye,
The untam'd zebra, beasts from foreign lands,
Beauteous or rare, were with nice judgment rang'd.
Bowers there were, sweet shrubs and brilliant flowers,
And nymphs, and dance, and festival, and song,—
Then the ten thousand actors in this scene,
In costumes of all hues and qualities,
Each suited to the office that he held.
There was a man, if man he could be call'd,
Who had no age, being neither old nor young,
Chain'd by an iron girdle to a tree ;—
A giant monster, dwarf'd, deform'd, and grim,
Whose muscles seem'd to roll upon his bones,
That never knew an honest covering ;
And through his matted hair his kindling eyes
Loom'd on his destin'd mortal enemy :
The wondrous snowy brilliance of his teeth,
Perfection mocking his deformity,
Gleam'd through the swarthy freckles of his skin,
Bronz'd in a life's defiance to the sun.
On either side an Ethiopian youth,
Perfect in symmetry and supple grace,
With naked skin of satin ebony

Zon'd by a belt of emerald and gold,
Held one an antique ewer fill'd with wine ;
The other a huge vermaille-fretted cup,
To serve the giant culprit's privilege,
And feed his courage for the coming fight.
Ferocious as his deed, all criminals
Were spotless in his brute comparison ;—
Slave, he had slain his master while asleep,
And had devour'd his heart.
A fasting lion in a rocky den,
Disdaining other than the flesh of man,
And destin'd to devour him in his turn
In the arena when the fight was done,
Was chain'd before him, not so far apart
But that the mingling of their fetid breath
And fiery eyes returning glare for glare
Gave foretaste of defiance, blood for blood ;—
Anon the famish'd monster beats the air,
And rearing o'er his prey his hideous roar,
Seems to shake Pharaoh and his mighty host.
Into his native den meanwhile the man,
Equally mad with courage and with wine,
Braves and defies, and with his sinewy arms
Throws forth to grapple with his horny hands,
Emboss'd and rigid in their iron strength,
All arm'd with nails yellow as eagle's claws
Prepar'd to plough his victim to the bone :
He laugh'd a hideous and cavern'd laugh,
As echo'd from some monster of the woods.
Grave soldiers doubted of the victory
The lion or the man.
Then in the midst of all rose high in air
A towering pagoda, on whose top
An ample platform of sweet cedar wood,
Reclin'd a monster frightful to behold,—

A dragon body with a human head.
His eyes were sapphires burning in their orbs,
And all his scales of massive jewelry
So artfully bestow'd that the sun's beams
Play'd on a thousand scintillating rays
Dazzling in their harmonious brilliancy;
His hair of diamond sparkles threaded lithe;
His teeth of pearls matchless in shape and size,
Pallid and pure, opaque, of the moon's tint
Seen through a white and soft unveiling cloud;
His face incongruous ponderous iron-wood,
Marbled with yellow veins of native growth,
Wrinkled and old, and black as ebony,
Carv'd in a torment by fanatic hands,
In form and colour ghastly hideous,—
The man, the brute, the demon mystical;—
And 'neath his gaping mouth his nether lip
Was pierc'd and drooping with a golden ring
Broad as your palm, besmear'd promiscuously
(Priceless defiance of contemnèd art)
With gems creation-born so primitive
That time, impatient at their latent growth,
Grew fretful and expos'd them to the light,—
Ransom of old from three barbaric kings,
Grand masterpiece indeed, ignoble strife
Of that once brilliant race undeified,
Of fallen angels forfeit of their wings.
Around the potent god a hundred priests
Burnt incense, and with bodies lowly curb'd
Utter'd his name with gravity and awe,
While on each stage a widen'd turret, throng'd
With magi of the temple, sumptuously
Adorn'd in all the splendour of their caste:
Following at intervals the signal given
By the high-priest, as suddenly inspir'd

These beat their gongs, and all the countless host
Turn'd to the beast adoring.—
Great Pharaoh reverently touch'd his front,
While Joseph's sadness struggled with a smile.
Such life and movement ne'er was seen before,
Sieges and single combats, eddy fights,
On mount or plain in swift succession came;
And the imperial army, foot and horse,
Wag'd mimic war, but somewhat dangerous,
Rous'd by contagious ardour of the scene;
And many a feud and private enmity
Had this day sanguinary issue found,
Were it not writ in crimson characters
On a gigantic banner snowy-white,
Wav'd ever to the trumpet's warning sound,—
'Mark! He who sheds a drop of human blood
During this day of plenty and of peace
Shall by the royal archers of the king
Be put to sudden death. Joseph, the lord
And governor of Egypt, thus decrees
Glory and honour to his living God.'

Scene IV.—*A Meadow.*

Enter Joseph *attended, and* Harvestmen *severally.*

Joseph

Now, are the men at labour in the fields?

First Harvestman

As thick as bees, great sir, and not one drone
Amongst them.

JOSEPH

Let them lose no single grain.
Plenty sometimes proves coy, and like a maid
Who fears a waste because too easy won,
Will frown and turn upon your confidence:
Then thriftless prodigals do think on orts,
Envy your beggars, and o'er-beat the straw,
Where struggling grains are jewels.

FIRST HARVESTMAN

I am come,
Commanded by your steward, to unfold
The issue of our labour. All the west
Of this great city, e'en from bound to bound,
Hath not a shed, or tent, or archèd roof,
Where lay our city stores, but it is gorg'd
Brim-full of weighty grain; nay, not a crack
Or crevice doth remain of public holds
But it is chok'd with it, and yet men flock
With empty purses and with laden cars
Craving for coin, and sick as plenteousness.
I left some hundreds thronging by the way,
Out of all spirit that your steward paus'd
To purchase more till you had given command.

JOSEPH

Go, lade thy asses with two sacks of coin:
Buy all thou canst, and do not 'bate in price,
But pay the equal sum that I have fix'd
For every measure; and although these men
Will race to rid them of their future bread,
We will not therefore in our better sense
Take mean advantage of their ignorance.—

Besides, their coin must every piece come back
When their need presses.

First Harvestman

But, my gracious lord,
What can we do with such a waste of corn
Unless we raise a mountain on the ground
And leave the dew and sun our harvestmen
To form a rind, and thus to roof itself?

Joseph

Call all the carpenters and builders round,
And over-pay them half their proper hire;
And all the youth who have the strength to leap,
And all the old men that can touch the ground,
And let these last go out into the fields
And gather stover, rushes, reeds, and fern:
Command the first hew down the sapling oaks,
And bring them to the city, and there build
A granary to reach three thousand feet;
And let the thatchers thatch it from the rain.
Cram that, and if the land still throws her fraught,
Then raise another.

First Harvestman

I will see it done.

Joseph

This officer shall go along with thee.
See that the men who labour in my rule
Are amply paid, according to their work,
At shut of eve. Without a metal spur,
That which I order will be sloven'd o'er.
The eye and appetite thus over-fed,
Will turn the stomach of their gratitude,

And Heaven's bounty will be scorn'd to waste :
A miner's eye is sick of swarthy gold.

First Harvestman

The bidding of my lord shall be perform'd. [*Exit.*

Joseph

The air is never cold, nor burning hot ;
And usual extremity is sunk
In temp'rate days, and nourishing moist nights.
Birds swarm, and flowers blow, as if all things
Yielded to some magician's fantasy ;
Laughter is heard wherever you can turn,
And men are fat as puttocks in a cage,
Fed choicely for the knife.—And such a turn
Would famine fain bestow on us withal—
E'en things of slothful life do feel the change ;
The crocodile hath left her slimy bed
Encradled in the rushes of the Nile,
And makes a journey over marsh and flat
To hide her early eggs. Fierce snakes do quit
The rooted bottoms of the lordly woods,
And prey in meadows. Eagles have been seen
To settle in the city, and the kids
And heifers do break through the pasture bound ;
A general and uncheck'd liberty,
Bred of this sudden change, doth tempt all things
To shun the habits of old circumstance.
Herein man's image too may be espied ;
As when a beggar finds a miser's hoard,
To right and left he scatters it away
Till he is once more brought unto a crutch ;
And men will sleep upon a dangerous ground
Nor dream of yawning earthquake underneath.
Great God doth jerk our judgments oftentimes—

Raises the fear, or punishes the fault—
But out, alas! once more the cup is full,
And sudden we are drunk. Men, in the mass,
Buy dear experience to throw away.
This lean and frightful famine now at hand
Will shake our city; some two seasons gone,
And then comes waste, and old abuse, and want.
So the great moral is thus cast away,
And wisdom in the public walk lies dead.
Men will be men, while God is merciful!

END OF THE THIRD ACT

ACT IV

Scene I.—*Canaan, Jacob's Tent.*

Enter Reuben, Asher, Judah, Naphtali, *and* Dan.

Reuben

What 's to be done ?

Asher

Lie down and die.

Reuben

Oft-times
The pregnant harvest at its early birth
Has so o'errun the measure of our need,
That the full bins have musted in the shed
For lack of use. Alas ! our famish'd want
Would fain be friendly with our former waste,
And give God thanks.

Judah

Alas ! where will this end ?
Two seasons now are past, and we have look'd
With hollow eye upon the fruitless earth ;
And look'd in vain ; for not a single blade
From all the thousand grains we scatter'd forth,
Comes in the emerald livery of spring
To cheer our anxious and desponding sight.

Enter JACOB *and* BENJAMIN

JACOB

How fare my sons ?

NAPHTALI

Idly, against our wills.

JACOB

God's will be done ! It is a grievous thing
For me and thee and all thy brethren here
To feel the lack of bread,—most pitiful.

NAPHTALI

Come, and mark out our final resting place,
And make us coffins straight.

JACOB

Despair is sin.

NAPHTALI

It is as well to wrangle with despair,
As sigh to death with hope.—What hope have we ?
The wind doth whistle through our granaries
(Enwomb'd and hollow as a dead man's skull),
Lord of the empty space ; for the small beasts
Desert it as a thriftless tenement.
The paths that led to pastures and to fields
For want of use are over-laid with dust ;
Old customs, too, that were our daily work
And daily bread, are bolted from our use
In the hard seasons. Spring doth blow the grain
Back in our faces ere it can be sown,
And autumn yields us ample crops of dust.

All savage things that we do kill for food
Are thrice as savage, being scant of food;
And leanness pays our danger.

JACOB

Mark, oh Heaven!
Old Jacob's heart is wrung for all his tribe:
A heavy freight, wherein he doth forget
Himself.—Have mercy, then.

NAPHTALI

What shall we do?

JUDAH

Alas! I know not; patience is worn out.
The weary months, like to a stubborn brood
Of disobedient children, still do swerve
From nature's docile rule, and mar themselves.
Heaven does not weep to see so sad a spring,
And therefore is she parchèd in her youth,
And summer smoulders like a smother'd fire,
And bakes the crusted earth. Rivers dry up;
The winter is all wind; moist nourishment
Is suck'd up from the land; and barrenness,
In all its cruelty, mocks at man's need.

Enter SIMEON, LEVI, ZEBULUN, GAD, *and* ISSACHAR.

SIMEON

We shall be starv'd to death,—

NAPHTALI

What further ill?

ZEBULUN

Lo you! we left ten cattle in the mead,
And nine have died of hunger.

LEVI

There is no mead;
But all the place that was a general swamp
Is as though struck by lightning, sing'd and burnt.

DAN

Mountain or flat, low glen, or peering mound,
Hath cast its mantle for an umber gloom,
And summer's vestige only doth remain
In dying ivy or in holly sere.

SIMEON

Our cattle languish, bellowing for food:
And when they die, we lack the means to live.

REUBEN

Famine is like the demon of despair;
It swallows all the substance it can find,
Then preys on its own arms.

ZEBULUN

Creatures of kin
We often see do feed upon their young;
Thus famine eats itself.

GAD

I turn'd a mouse
From out its nest by chance—stor'd in the hold
With nuts, with acorns, almonds, and with rice:
'Herein (said I) man's lofty pride 's pull'd down,
Even by a creature that doth live in straws.

Had all my brothers had but half thy wit
We should be full and frugal, sleek as thou;
Not like the empty lions howling here.'

REUBEN

Yea, man's chief lesson is extremity.
He never knows what precious comfort is
Till it is lost.

JUDAH

How weary are our days
That us'd to pass in healthful exercise,
In pleasurable thrift, and sweet repast!
Our nights were like a minute thrown away—
A draught of balm unto a parchèd thirst
Exchang'd for renovation and fresh joy.
Now all our minutes, fledg'd with leaden wings,
Are like to notes struck from a domèd bell
By a vast giant with an iron club.
The time we held as musing vacancy
We find was sweet content; and all in vain
We try to touch the hour with cheerfulness
Which hangs about us like a brooding cloud.

ISSACHAR

Yea, who shall mend it? What 's the best to do?

JACOB

A general vengeance from the hand of God,
In heavy visitation on the land,
Is spread around: it is a bitter cup!
A little mercy at the bottom still
Was ever left for man's affliction.—
Arise, my sons: I cannot mend your wants,
But I do hear there is a certain man
Of great renown, who rules the far-off land

Where Pharaoh, the Egyptian, reigns as king.
Go, get ye up, and take your mules and sacks,
With money in your palms, and crave of him
To sell your corn, that ye and yours may live,
Nor linger thus in want. Go, every man,
Excepting Benjamin, my youngest boy ;
Him I will keep, lest danger by the way
Should be enamour'd of his tender youth,
And rob me of his sight.

NAPHTALI

Better we may,—
Much worse we cannot be.

JACOB.

Heaven prosper you. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—*A Hall.*

JOSEPH, *seated on a high seat somewhat apart :* Officers, Citizens, *and* Attendants.

JOSEPH

Time wendeth by us in eventful life
Even as the trees and houses seem to glide
As we pass by them in a rapid car :
But as the wind doth rob the seeded grass,
Lodging it on some mountain out of sight,
So in his passage Time doth steal away
The seeds of old remembrance, and but leaves
The fruitless husk of all our wealth of woe—
Of woe, indeed, for things of joy do die
Upon the action.—Joy is the grave of joy :

And all the past, that was so long a-doing,
Is swallow'd in the minute that 's to come.
New hope still smiles to hear old memory,
In long perspective, tell the tale of woe,—
At best, joy touch'd with melancholy pain.
Just so do I forget my father's house,
Filling another place in this great world.
And now my grievèd heart is worn as smooth
As wounds that heal, and leave a tender scar.
Youth is soon trammell'd in new circumstance,
And man at best returneth to himself,
Or e'er his holy grief hath made him feel
Why God afflicts him. There 's a precious door,
And through that door a glorious court in heaven,
Where I do hope to see my father's face.
And all our house, and shed no human tears.

Enter Steward.

STEWARD

Great lord, the famine rageth in the land,
And the two barren seasons that are gone
Show us no hope, but, if they 'bate in strength,
Recoil with more effect in stubborn wrath.
The men are fain to give you any price
For food by which to live.

JOSEPH

Be ye discreet
In distribution: so shall Pharaoh see
He did not choose an idle officer.
Leave nought to chance that wisdom may command.
Oh! love all goodly business for its end;
So shall thy motive ne'er be put to shift,

And thou shalt teach success to wait on thee;
For frugal plenty 'mid this general dearth
Did grow of such wise means, and kills sad want.
According to each separate household's need,
The aged, and the young, so measure forth
Enough to sustain life, and take the coin
They bring; but give no more than need requires.
[*Exit* Steward.

Enter Simeon, Reuben, Issachar, Dan, Judah, Zebulun, Naphtali, Levi, Gad, *and* Asher.

Joseph

Strangers! What men are these?—not Egypt born—
Great God! they are my brothers—sure they're come
Driven from valèd tents in search of food.
My blood doth throng for passage to my heart,
And mounts again with an enforcèd flow,
Instinctive to look out upon itself,
Warming its kindred veins!—they are my brothers.
[*Aside.*

Reuben

Great ruler, hail!

Joseph [*Aside.*

Ha! that is Reuben's voice.

Reuben

Vouchsafe to look upon thy servants' wants.

Judah

Peace yet awhile—he heeds you not, but is
Steep'd in internal thinking: us he sees

Like one who tries to realize a dream,
Present, yet absent: some great subject has
O'erflooded his deep mind. His thought absorbs
His sight. The ardour of its bent is in
His eye, and beams on us, even as the sun
Looks out upon a lake!—therefore have peace,
Lest you offend the man, and raise his wrath.

JOSEPH [*Aside.*

Have I, then, brothers? I have been so long
A shaft o'ershot into a foreign ground
That I have taken root and sprung to leaf,
And bear a foreign blossom on my boughs,
And they are strangers underneath my shade:
Yet they shall pluck of me the rarest fruit.—
The sight of them doth tug upon my heart,
And novel joy subdues my troubled frame.—
What men are these? [*Aloud.*

REUBEN

From Canaan are we come
To beg my lord will sell us of his grain
That we and ours may live.

JOSEPH

Nay—nay—not so.
I see that ye are not Egyptian men.
Spies are ye all, or wherefore do ye come?

REUBEN

We are no spies: thy servants come for corn.

JOSEPH [*Aside.*

Ah! now I do remember of my dream—
I dream'd my father and my brethren all

Did bow before me—lo! now, and behold!
All but my father wait on me in fear—
Ah! doth old Israel still draw breath? my father!
My eye doth perfectly deliver him:
Wherefore, I will not ask, for fear the sad
Recording of his death should drive that hence,—
Then of the image and the substance too
I am bereav'd.—Howbeit, God's will be done!—
I say, to pry into the land you come, [*Aloud.*
As spies, to see its nakedness.—Tell me—
Have you a father?

JUDAH

Ruler in Egypt, yes:
The venerable patriarch still lives:
Thy servants are twelve brethren in the land.—
The youngest with our father sojourneth
Unto this day; and we are those who came
From Canaan to your Egypt to buy corn:
And one is not.

JOSEPH

I see that you are spies.
Herein you shall be prov'd:—by Pharaoh's life
Except your youngest brother come to you,
Hence you shall not depart.—Take them away.—
[*Exeunt attended.*
Oh! what a treasure have I found this day,
And what a curious circle have we run!
God, through their hatred, hath made me their lord:
They sold me forth, and now they beg of me.
My heart is still the same, and I will deal
With justice to myself, though not to them.
Yea, we must dwell together, and some way

I must design to pluck them from the vale
Up the high mountain, where I keep my state,
And we will live in dearest fellowship.

Scene III.—*A Prison.*

Simeon, Reuben, Issachar, Dan, Judah, Zebulun, Naphtali, Levi, Gad, *and* Asher.—Joseph *unperceived.*

Simeon

Three days we've been in ward.

Issachar

Were it the best
That we had died of famine in our tents,
Or that we wait upon this danger here?
I'm much at odds.

Reuben

We are unfortunate;
Surely some mischief will befall us here!

Dan

Alas! how cruel and unjust were we,
Even when we saw the anguish of his soul,
To sell our brother forth to dangerous hands.

Judah

It was a hateful crime, and I do loathe
Myself whene'er I think on't; so I will
Bear all mischance that may accrue to me,
As 'twere my just desert for that foul sin.

LEVI

Where'er he is, great God! have eyes on him.

ISSACHAR

It was an evil thing, and I repent.

SIMEON

So, Issachar, do I.

REUBEN

I told you so—
Would you had listen'd then to my complaint.
Said I not, 'Sin not ye against this child'?
But ye were deaf and stubborn,—would not hear,—
Wherefore behold his blood is on our heads;
For Heaven hath a memory for these things.

ISSACHAR

Ah! since I have had children of my own
My brother liveth much within my mind.

JUDAH

Yea, what a coward it doth make a man!
For he who had the most to do in it
Would think him best if he had had the least.

JOSEPH

Oh! let me find some shade wherein to weep,
For all my sorrows seem but as a day.
A little penitence doth quite absorb
An age of suffering—sweet penitence!
That as a holy flame doth burn away
The stubborn cord that ties us to ourselves. [*Exit.*

DAN

How mean a man becomes in his own eye
When anguish binds him fast to penitence!
To pity those on whom he trod before
And drove to the same anguish.

JUDAH

Yea, 'tis true:
It is the way of men and hunters both
(For human hunters differ but in this,—
One preys for the hide, the other for man's heart),
To stand and shoot their random shafts abroad:
Sometimes they hit and kill—more often wound,
And the poor maim'd doth languish in its pain:
So do men war on men with words or blows
More merciless than tigers of the cave.—
Ah! misery to seek our brother's blood!

Re-enter JOSEPH, *with* Officers, Attendants, *&c.*

JOSEPH

Albeit, men, I do suspect you spies,
Be wise: this do, and live; for I fear God.—
One of you shall be bound and kept in ward,
And you, the rest, shall lade your beasts with corn,
And travel to your home and give them food;
And when you bring your other brother back
I will release the bound, and you shall live.
And by the bringing of the youngest son
You shall be prov'd; for I do fear you much.—
Bind me this man. [SIMEON *is bound.*

SIMEON

Remember, brethren, that you leave me here.
Unless you bring my brother to this land
My blood will sure be spilt. [*Exit.*

REUBEN

We shall remember.

JUDAH

Thy servants bow them even to the earth,
And beg my lord will deal with them as they
Shall prove to him. [*Exeunt.*

JOSEPH

Come hither, officer:
Brim all their sacks, and give them of the best:
Send them provisions, and supply their wants;
And each man's money put thou in the mouth
Of each man's sack; and see them safely forth;
[*Exit* Officer.
For it were strange that I, who scarce have found
My dearest kindred, my own proper flesh,
Should deal less proudly with them. Yet awhile,
And they will be return'd, and Jacob soon
(If God be willing), and his goodly tribe,
Enrich my anxious sight.—I long till then. [*Exit.*

SCENE IV.—*Jacob's Tent.*

Enter REUBEN, ZEBULUN, DAN, *and* NAPHTALI.

REUBEN

Our food is gone, and what are we to do?
We may not go to this Egyptian lord
Without our brother, for he surely then
Will deal with us as spies.

ZEBULUN

And that I fear
Will scarcely be; for Jacob did deny,
In wrathful terms, our hardly-urg'd request
When first we did return into the land:
And therefore Simeon has in danger lodg'd
Until this hour.

Enter JACOB, BENJAMIN, JUDAH, *and* LEVI.

JACOB

I say he shall not go.—
Wherefore bereave me of my children thus?
Joseph is not, and Simeon is not,
And now ye will take Benjamin away.—
All these things are against me.

REUBEN

If I fail
To bring my brother back to you again,
Slay my two children.

JUDAH

Thou sayest unto thy sons,
'Go forth, buy corn; we famish'.—So we would;
But that the man did solemnly command
We should not see his face until we brought
Our other brother down.

DAN

Therefore, we say,
If thou wilt let him go with us, 'tis well;
If not, we cannot go.

JACOB

Why did you deal
So hardly with me as to tell the man
That I had yet another son at home?

JUDAH

The man did chide us, saying, 'Ye are spies',
And often question'd us of our estate.
How could we know that he would say to us,
'Bring me your brother'?

JACOB

Benjamin is all
That I have left of Rachel's children now.
Joseph is lost for ever from my eyes;
And if you take this boy, and he should fall
In the way of danger as you go, you bring
My grey hairs down with sorrow to the grave.

LEVI

Brothers, it is decreed we stay and die.

JACOB

Not so—not so.—Yet what am I to do?—
How was it that each man did find enclos'd
His money in his sack? Is it not strange
To send the money back to those who buy?—
And Simeon, too,—Simeon did go with you,
And he, you say, was made a prisoner.—
It is a dangerous thing: he shall not go!

ZEBULUN

Why, then, we cannot go into the land.

JACOB

Mischief will come if you do take the boy.

ZEBULUN

And if we stay, both he and we must starve.

JACOB

And is it nothing, to lose children thus?

NAPHTALI

One of two evils surely thou must choose;
Either thyself, thy sons, and all thy tribe,
Must perish here about thy tent for want,
Or thou must send the boy down in our hand
And we will bring back Simeon, and corn;
And Benjamin, and all thy tribe shall live;
And if we had not linger'd o'er this thing,
We had been down into the land, and back.

JUDAH

Nay, let my father trust the lad with me;
I will be bond and surety that he shall
Return to thee. And if I bring him not,
For ever be the blame upon my head,
And let my father shun me.

JACOB

Take from out
Our scanty stores the dainties of the land,—
Of balm, of myrrh, of spices, and of nuts,
Almonds, and honey: and let every one
Take double money, and therewith the same
That was return'd before into his sack;
For peradventure 'twas an oversight.

And also take your brother in your hand—
Arise, and go ; and God be merciful,
So that the man may send back Simeon
And Benjamin : for if I am bereav'd
Of all my children, then I am bereav'd !

JUDAH

Fear not—
The man will know by this we are no spies,
And will return us Simeon to our hands ;
And, seeing we are better than he thought,
Treat us with courtesy.

JACOB

Amen—amen !— [*Exit.*

Enter ISSACHAR.

JUDAH

Ah, Issachar, there is blood upon thy brow !

ISSACHAR

Blood is more like to bead upon my brow
Than is a tear to tremble in my eye.
Oh ! that this famine were incorporate,
That I might wrestle with him for the fall.

LEVI

Where hast thou been these three hours, Issachar ?

ISSACHAR

Into the wilderness, o'er vale and mount,
To struggle with the panther for his heart.
Why do you blench, why do you stand at bay,
And tamely let this famine suck your blood ?

Man hath a touch of the great elements,—
In fierce distress he should o'erleap himself,
And ravage like an angel that is chaf'd ;
His spirit, being press'd as ours is now,
Should rage within him like a furnace clos'd :
Become rich fire to quench the wrath of fate,
Firm as the earth, like stubborn as the wind
That roars along the valley in the storm.
Yea, with repulsive power, like that which heaves
The sick Leviathan league after league,
Bruis'd, on the mountain backs of forkèd waves,—
Let us but think our former life hath been
Idle and womanish, and now begin
To play with danger as an exercise
Fitting our manhood, and our labouring breath.
Oh, power and fortitude, I will have food !
Why faint ? why die ? The eagles and their young,
The lion and the cub, still live as prey.
When not the bosom of the earth hath roots,
The trees bear bark to serve us for a need ;
When there is nothing left us but the air
We can but die.

DAN

There is some comfort yet.
We are to go to Egypt to buy corn,
Which the chief ruler sells.

ISSACHAR

Yea, anything
Rather than yield to this extremity.
Come to my tent, and browse upon the food.

Scene V.—*Joseph's House.*

Reuben, Simeon, Benjamin, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Dan, Zebulun, Naphtali, Gad, *and* Asher.

Zebulun

Why should this lord command us to his house ?

Naphtali

He doth intend some evil unto us :
And for the money found within our sacks
I fear 'tis his design to fall on us
And claim our cattle, and sell us for slaves.

Judah

Yonder the steward standeth at the door.
I'll speak with him.

Enter Steward.

Oh, sir ! we are in fear
Lest that my lord be wrathful unto us.
In truth, we came at first to buy us food :
And lo ! it came to pass, that at the inn
We op'd our sacks, and in the mouth of each
We found our money in full weight restor'd.
Lo ! you ; we have it with us in our hands,
And other moneys have we brought besides
To buy us food : indeed we cannot tell
How that our money come into our sacks.

Steward

Peace be to you ; fear not,—I had your money.

SIMEON

Yet we do fear, seeing that we are brought
Into the ruler's house.

STEWARD

My lord did say:
'Go thou, release the man that is in ward,
And bring him with these others from the hall
Into my house, and slay and make a feast;
For I intend the men to dine with me.'
And therefore have I brought you.

JUDAH

It is strange!

STEWARD

Look you, the ruler comes.

Enter JOSEPH, Attendants, Officers, *&c.*

JOSEPH

So you are come again to buy more corn.
I did repent me that I thought you false,
And when I heard your brother was come down
Releas'd the man from ward.—You are no spies.

SIMEON

Thy servants all bow down unto my lord,
Like unto pines that stoop before the wind.

JUDAH

Our father, seeing that my lord was kind,
Sends this poor present, which we humbly lay
Low at thy foot.

ISSACHAR

The patriarch Israel,
Whose bulk doth bend beneath a weight of days—
Whose breast retreats, like to a hollow bank,
Inwrought by the long current of his years,—
Yea, even Jacob bids us bow to thee.

JOSEPH

Ah! say you so? and is your father well—
The venerable man of whom you spake,—
And is he yet alive?

JUDAH

My lord is pleas'd
To think upon his servants past desert:
Our father lives, and is in perfect health.

JOSEPH

I have heard speak of Canaan: they say
It is a goodly place, and full of springs;
That there are tents, and pastures, green retreats,
Wherein you shepherds lead a happy life.

SIMEON

It was, my lord; but famine and long drouth
Have marr'd its virtues.

JOSEPH

Has it gone so hardly?

SIMEON

Enough to starve us.—Surely, if my lord
Had not been bountiful and sold us corn,
Old Israel and his sons, and all the tribe,
Had died without their graves.

JOSEPH

Yea, this was much.
Yet you all live, you say—and who is this?
Your younger brother that you told me of?
Come hither, boy,—let me peruse thy face.—
Who was thy mother?

BENJAMIN

Rachel, my good lord.
My mother died before my memory
Had register'd her face within my mind,
But I have heard that she was beautiful;
And oftentimes my father talks of her
Till the large tears steal down his silver beard;
And oftentimes he mourneth for his son:—
She had another son, my brother, sir:
Somewhat of him I fairly can recall,
And of the doleful sorrow of the time
(My father shakes unto this very day),—
For it was said that he was strangely lost.

ISSACHAR

You do presume too far upon my lord.

JOSEPH

Not much—not much—I can away with it.
Yea, God be merciful to thee, my son!
Methinks I've seen a face like thine before,
And such a voice I know I've often heard
In time of infancy; therefore, good youth,
Though our estates do differ in some odds,
Our Egypt's custom shall be entertain'd—
I kiss thy cheek—yea, upon either side:
My courtesy is choice, but liberal.

BENJAMIN

Oh! it will glad my father much to hear
Of your great kindness to his lovèd son.
Since I am Rachel's child and Joseph's brother,
There was a vast ado to bring me forth:
Old Jacob's heart was almost fit to burst—
But even then he patch'd it with a prayer.
For such, sir, is my father, even Jacob.

JOSEPH

Deeply enshrin'd within my memory,
'Midst thoughts of early years, as God doth know,
Lives the remembrance of a man like this:
Therefore I'll love thee for thy father's sake.
The staff of such a man is honourable—
That is, if he be old and grasps a staff.

BENJAMIN

My father, sir, is old.

JOSEPH

Very infirm?

BENJAMIN

Time verily hath eat into his frame,
But he is such a ruin as is cheer'd
By plants and blossoms creeping over it—
And such are his good spirits.

JOSEPH

A shrewd youth!
I'd venture much thou hast thy mother's eyes.

BENJAMIN

I have been told so, sir.

JOSEPH

A blessing on them.—
Go in,—attend and show them to the hall.
Go, you, and sweeten water for their feet, [*Exeunt.*
For I intend they shall eat bread with me.
Take of the richest scents of all my house,
And bring the customary bunch of herbs,
Of myrrh, of thyme, of rue, and lavender,
And sprinkle all their garments and their heads,
And give each one to wear it in his breast;
And in all things observe respect to them.
[*Exit* Attendant.
Go you unto the hall and dress the board.
And he that is the youngest let him have
Five times of all the best beyond the rest.
Let them be set before me, face to face;
And bring me of the choicest wine I have,
And richest fare. [*Exit* Steward.
Oh! surely this will prove
Too great a trial! I am almost chok'd
With keeping back my tears.—Oh! great Nature,
I never did expect thou wouldst inflict
So deep a joy as this!—my heart will send
Its perfect feeling welling to my eyes—
The secret is too big for one frail breast! [*Exit.*

SCENE VI.—*A Room in Joseph's House.*

Enter an Officer *and* Steward *severally.*

OFFICER

Thou art to furnish each man's sack with corn,
And in the mouth of that which is the boy's

Put thou this cup wherefrom my lord doth drink.
Mind that thou know it not: see to it straight,
For they have left the hall and take their leave.

STEWARD

Fear not,—it shall be done, and secretly.

OFFICER

This being done, and all the men gone forth,
Take thou some servants and go after them,
And speak unto them even in these words:
'Ye Canaanites, turn back unto my lord,
For he is wroth that you do thus return
Evil for good: which man hath got the cup?
Yea, even the cup that was upon the board,
In which my lord divineth and doth drink?
This cup is taken, and it is with you.'
Then shall the men profess to thee the truth,
And strangely look into each other's face;
And each one, feeling his own honesty,
And for the general safety, will exclaim
'Yea, he that hath it let him even die.'
Then shall they all unlade and thou shalt search,
(Beginning at the eldest) in their sacks.
So in the end it will fall out, the cup
Shall be in the sack of him, the youngest born.
My lord doth say they will not yield him up,
But all of them come back again to him.

STEWARD

Yea, this is very strange.

OFFICER

No man doth know
The ruler's act until he find the end.
I never heard that he e'er did man wrong;

Therefore his subtlety is wise, not craft.
Have thou a care of this, for such a man
Fails in the practice when his trust is false.

STEWARD

I am his steward and shall be diligent,
And love to do the thing that you command.
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE VII.—*A Hall in Joseph's House.*

JOSEPH, Officer, *&c.*—*Enter* REUBEN, SIMEON, LEVI, JUDAH, ISSACHAR, ZEBULUN, DAN, NAPHTALI, GAD, ASHER, *and* BENJAMIN.

JOSEPH

Ah! wherefore has thou done this evil thing?
Wottest thou not that such a man as I
Can easily divine? Was it so well,
After my bounty and my goodness shown,
To fail as you have done?

JUDAH

What shall we say?—
What can we speak, my lord? Behold, we kneel.
We are the bondmen of my lord, both we,
And he, the boy, with whom the cup was found.

JOSEPH

Nay, God forbid that I should be so hard:
Only the man with whom the cup was found
Shall be my bondman; all the rest arise,
And go in peace unto your father's house.

JUDAH

My lord is even bountiful in this;
Yet let your servant speak unto your ear,

Nor raise your anger, for you are indeed
Even as great as Pharaoh in the land.—
My lord did ask of us about our home,
Whether we had a father yet alive,
And of his children; when your servants said,
'Our sire is very old, and hath a son,
The only flower and comfort of his age;
A little one, whose brother is long dead,
And he alone is left of Rachel's sons;—
Wherefore his father loveth him as life.'

SIMEON

We all do love our father, sir, so much,
That we dare not return without the boy,
Lest we should lose him by a broken heart.

JUDAH

Then said my lord, 'Bring down the boy to me
That I may set my eyes on him'; whereat
Your servants, stooping low unto you, said,
'The man is old, and he doth love the child,
And if we take him from him he will die';
And lo! my lord was wroth, and did command
That we should bring the lad, or never dare
Set eyes upon his countenance again.
All this we told our father, and the corn
Was all consum'd before his patience came:
At length, sore press'd by famine and sharp want,
He did commit his life (which is his boy)
Unto our hands, and we did promise him
Never to ask a blessing at his hands
Until our brother should come back again.
And it shall come to pass, when he shall see
The lad is not with us, that he will die;
And we shall bring down our own father's hairs,

Grey as they are, with sorrow to the grave.
Therefore I pray my lord to let me stay,
A bondman to my lord, and let the lad
Go with his brethren forth instead of me;
And so our father shall not die, but live.

REUBEN

My lord will pardon me if I shall ask,
Hath he a father? then with our eyes behold
The awful pain it is to have a hand
In breaching of the comfort of his age;
Or so to pave the way of circumstance,
That his own sons shall be the instruments
To lay him in his grave before his time.

JUDAH

Therefore be merciful to us, my lord,
And counsel us what is the best to do.
We fear to use our father cruelly.

JOSEPH

Cause every one to leave me with these men.
[*Exeunt* Attendants.
Did you not say you had a brother lost,
Or dead?

JUDAH

Nay, he was lost, my lord. Perchance
He fell in danger, and is dead.

JOSEPH

I am
Your brother—lo! behold!—'tis I am he,—
Joseph, your brother!—And doth Israel live—
Our father, Jacob, the good, wise old man?
I cannot speak, for tears do wash my cheek,
And I have scarcely breath to welcome you.—

You cannot speak, for you are wrapp'd around
In strange confusion of fear, shame, and grief.
You do not know how I do joy once more
To look upon my brothers.—Nay, come near—
Come round about me—surely, I am he
That you did sell unto the Ishmaelite;
But I am he that will not think of that.
God hath a sure and simple way, my friends,
In causing mortals to enact His will—
Yea, good doth come of evil; I was sent
Out of my father's bosom to this land,
To cherish life; and lo! what hath betid!
Greatness and glory God hath given me:
Therefore grieve not, nor fret upon your act,
For I declare 'twas God who sent me forth.
Reuben and Judah, I am dash'd with joy—
Come, let me lean upon your shoulders.—Come—
Nay, do not weep—now in with me and talk.
I have much comfort for my brothers' ears,
And much to listen to.—Govern your hearts;
I may not pluck of them, they are too ripe.—
Simeon, or Issachar, bring Benjamin
Along, and follow all about me close. [*Exeunt.*

Scene VIII.—*Jacob's Tent.*

Enter Jacob, Reuben, Issachar, Zebulun, Judah, *and* Benjamin.

Jacob

My mind doth fear to trust to your report,
Like one who newly finds a precious mine,
Which, in the sounding, proveth all a blank;
And then the man dies, not for what is lost,

But what imagination did possess.
It were a dangerous thing for me, my sons,
To trust to such a blessed dream as this,
And make a common man.

REUBEN

Believe it true.
'Haste you,' saith he, 'go up and tell my sire
How God hath made me dear to Pharaoh's heart,
Lord of his house, and ruler in the land.'

ISSACHAR

And it is even so; for men do flock
For orders and commands in all affairs,
And those, the highest that attend the king,
Do bow before his face.

JUDAH

'Away,' saith he,
'And tell my father to come down to me'—
And here his voice did tremble in his throat,
And the large tears, which beam'd within the spheres
Of Rachel's eyes, colour'd and sweet like hers,
Were held by hope, and urged by desire,
Till, 'twixt the names of brethren and of father,
They shot their beds and fell upon my hand.

REUBEN

'Here shall ye live,' saith he, 'both ye and yours,
Your cattle and your herds; for there are yet
To be five years of famine in the land,
Nor caring neither harvest shall be known.—
Go, tell my father of my glory here
In the Egyptian land, and what you see;

And tarry not, but bring him hither straight,
That I may see my sire.'

BENJAMIN

And then he wept
In such an agony upon my neck,
Almost to swooning; kiss'd me on each cheek,
And these my brethren all, and sobb'd so loud
My heart ach'd at this music of sweet peace.

ZEBULUN

All Pharaoh's house marvell'd at his distress;
And when the king was told we were his kin,
He did command that we should lade our beasts,
And come to Canaan, and bring thee forth,
And ours, and all our household; and he said,
'Regard not of your stuff; for all the best
Of Egypt, yea, the fat of all the land
Is yours.'

JUDAH

And unto each of us he gave
Changes of raiment; and to Benjamin,
Three hundred pieces and five changes more.

ISSACHAR

And even now there come upon the way
Ten asses, laden choicely for thy need.
And yonder thou canst see the waggons sent
To carry us and ours into the land.

JACOB

Oh, God! I find that Thou art ever just.
Let no man grieve again, but be resign'd;
That which we see as ill,—God proveth good.

Enter SIMEON, DAN, NAPHTALI, LEVI, GAD, *and* ASHER.

SIMEON

Lo! here are all the waggons and the food.

JACOB

All that is nought! Joseph, my son, doth live!
I will go down and see him ere I die. [*Exeunt.*

SCENE IX.—*A Field at Beersheba.*

JACOB *asleep, amidst great splendour. A Voice speaketh from above. The wind dies away.*

Hear, Jacob!—I am He!—Thy father's God!
To go down into Egypt, fear thou not;
For I will there make of thee a great nation.
Lo! into Egypt will I go with thee;
And I will surely bring thee up again:
Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.

JACOB *riseth, and boweth down.*

JACOB

Yea, I am confident and much rejoic'd.
I am not worthy of Thy grace, O God!
Who would not be a servant of the Lord's,
Who loveth men when they are grey and old?
And cheereth the sad heart, and pours His voice
Into our human ears? Spirit of God,
Who seest the evil things of Jacob's days
And art not wroth therewith, behold he bows,
Feeling the weight of so much goodness fall
All suddenly upon his agèd head.

God's love 's a tree of grace that never dies;
All men may pluck thereof, whose sight is clear
To look to heaven, His bright pavilion:—
It nourisheth the soul, and the red heart.—
Since God hath said it, surely I shall see
My goodly Joseph favour'd in His sight;
And from the tribe of Jacob shall arise
A famous nation, favour'd of the Lord.

Enter BENJAMIN

BENJAMIN

What, ho! father, arise—the morning breaks,
And all our tribe are eager to depart.

JACOB

How fares my boy? is it the morning yet?
For darkness was but now upon the earth.

BENJAMIN

The moon retir'd in black embattled clouds,
And 'twixt her passing and the morning's light
There was a sable pause. The birds are up,
And in the woodland, skirting 'round our tents,
With rich and mellow notes sings forth the morn,
As handmaids do, that bring the maid abroad
Early, before the splendour of the day
Shall see her wedded to some graceful youth.—
How did my father sleep?

JACOB

Well—very well.—
The air is free and cool, and it bids fair
To be a cheerful day.

BENJAMIN

The sun did sink
Amidst a gentle breeze, behind yon line
Of umber mountains, crowning their rude heads
With showers of light, of a mild roseate hue;
Not angry-hot, chequer'd with partial gloom,
As when in wrathful muteness he retires,
Foreboding suddenly of wind and storm.—
See, in transparent vapour veil'd he rises,
Shifting the huge grey clouds from out his path,—
Just as a giant, 'merging from a cave,
Rolleth the rocky barriers from his hold.
He burneth his own incense, for that mist
Is gather'd from the eastern mountain's brow,
Where it hath laid in drops of early dew,
Nurs'd in the fragrant laps of swathèd flowers:
Of such sweet moisture doth he make his bath.
What a fine Spirit is our father's God,
Who moulded all this subtle beauty forth!

JACOB

Ah! ponder well on that, my Benjamin:
Thou'lt find the doer greater than the deed.

BENJAMIN

Now he doth look like me, both young and strong:
But ere he sinks he will be like to thee,
Fading, my father, as we all must do.
Behold him rise again more fresh and bright,—
Not like a golden garment, that doth fret
From its frail brightness, being worn too oft—
Therein he is so high above our heads.
It is long since a morning like to this
Has cheer'd our drooping hopes; nor can it last;

For Joseph says, five years of famine yet
Will linger o'er the land.

JACOB

Yea, God is good.

BENJAMIN

Yet why should God put us to want and pain,
Seeing we can but moan, nor help ourselves ?

JACOB

A little evil doth instruct much good.
The mind of man is stubborn to control,
And must be scourg'd into obedience.
The Spirit of God would fain be friends with man,
But man presumeth on God's temperance,
And drives His angel from his threshold forth
That he may sink to grossness and to vice ;
Therefore, lest man should fail into the beast
And quite destroy himself from off the earth,
God in His power and mercy doth compel,
Through sore affliction, that men's evil thoughts
Should be cast forth, seeing the pain they bring ;
And that they should incline their ear to good.
Whereat the love of God descends on them
As it would woo them to respect themselves.
All this is mercy ; for hard sufferance
Alone can curb and sway our wilfulness.
A moral given is worth ten thousand lives !—
Oh ! think not, boy, that pestilence or plague
Is idle execution at God's hand ;
He is Almighty Power, though great yet good.
It is a principle of power to feel
A portion of affliction, and our God

Can grieve. There 's not a man His wrath doth bend,
But, ere He breaks him, He doth weigh his heart,
Hoping to find him worthy of that bliss
That honesty inherits.

BENJAMIN

How say you, then ?
I have not yet had years to do offence ;
But save for him, my brother, I had starv'd.

JACOB

Thy question is offence enough alone ;
For it lacks faith, which is a boundless space.
Each man that doth wear flesh upon his bones,
Offendeth Heaven both by night and day.

BENJAMIN

Why, then there is no hope to be belov'd.

JACOB

Go to—go to—God's mercy is so great
That He accepts the will beyond the deed,
When that the will doth struggle to do well :—
How dost thou know that thou shouldst have been starv'd ?

BENJAMIN

Father, five years of famine are to come :
No means to gain our food remain'd for us.

JACOB

Could not the Power that made thy brother lord
And ruler over Egypt also make
The earth to gape and render food to us,
In spite of famine and the shade of death ? —

Come hither, boy, and let me kiss thy cheek,—
How couldst thou say God would abandon thee ?
He is the Father both of old and young,
And loveth us as I love thee, my boy.
Therefore do have a care thou ne'er again
Cast doubts upon His mercy and His power,
Lest that He should forget thee. I am prone
To think—nay, I am well convinc'd of it,
(Therefore look to it, and be virtuous)—
That God is scrutinous to shield or grieve,
According to men's goodness, or their vice.
The evil and the passions we allow
To get the better of the heart and blood,
Do plague us to the allowance of our fault;
Whilst, like thy brother, those we practise on,
According to their meekness and content,
Do wear a happy crown compar'd to them.—
Nay, do not weep—I did not mean it thus.
See that in future thou dost honour God.
Yea, Lord, these tears I dedicate to Thee.—
Come, sit upon my knee,—I will unfold
The nature of God's goodness unto me.
My father, Isaac, bless'd me in his age,
And sent me forth from Esau, by the way
That leads to Padan-Aram: for he said,
'Thou shalt not take a Canaanite to wife'.
And lo! I journey'd onward to the well
Of fruitful Haran, where I met withal
Thy mother Rachel, whom I did espouse,—
Yea, her whom God has taken to His rest:
But, ere I came, I gather'd me some stones
And laid me down to rest upon the plain,
For it was dark; and when I was asleep
A vision came upon me from the clouds:
There was a silence almost to be felt,

And lo! a mist was clearing from the land;
And all the air, and all the herbage round,
Was of sere umber colour, like to that
Which in the deepest shade of autumn dwells,
And mingled with the colour of my dream.
And lo! there was a ladder on the earth,
The top of which did reach unto the heavens,
In faint obscurity; and angels bright,
Like stars in ether veil'd, descended it,
And did ascend, glancing the heavy shade
With saffron-fire, such as the morning sheds.
And all the place did brighten at the top,
For God did stand there in His majesty;
And I, who slumber'd at the gloomy foot,
Did feel God's voice descend unto my ear.
Said He, 'Behold I am the Lord, the God
Of Abraham, thy father, and the God
Of Isaac. And the land whereon thou liest,
On thee will I bestow it and thy seed.
Countless thy seed shall be as is the dust,
And thou shall spread abroad into the west,
The east, the north, yea, even to the south:
In thee and all thy seed for evermore
My blessing on the families shall fall.
I am with thee, and I will keep thee safe
In all those places whither thou shalt go,
And bring thee back into this land again.
I will not leave thee until I have done
All that which I have spoken unto thee.'
Then the same deadly silence did ensue,
And all this shade and brightness was engloom'd
And veil'd in utter darkness from my sight.
And as I woke my joints did shake with dread;
For sure, said I, the Lord was in this place,
And I did know it not. This is God's house,—

The gate of heaven is here. And in the morn
I took my pillows up, of gather'd stones,
And rais'd a pillar, and pour'd oil thereon,
And made an oath, vowing that if the Lord
Would be with me, and keep me in the way,
And give me bread, and raiment to put on,
So I might come unto my father's house
In peace once more, that God should ever be
My Lord and God.—Now mark herein, my son,
How far He doth o'erpay His servant's worth.
He did exalt me unto wealth and ease,
Gave me a numerous and goodly tribe,
And ever hath been bountiful to me.
Thy brother he hath raisèd from a slave
To be a lord and prophet, and to save
Our lives, amongst a million, from this wreck
Which He has seen it wise to bring about.
He promis'd us we should increase and thrive,
And be a mighty nation: and behold,
Even now He doth prepare us for His will,
And brings us up to Egypt. Therefore, boy,
See that thou love His ways, and worship Him;
That also thou and thine, when I am dead,
May be belov'd and nourish'd in the land.

BENJAMIN

I shall lay up within my memory
The counsels of my father, and fear God.

JACOB

Why, that is well; and thou shalt reap the fruit.
The tribe of Israel shall multiply;
Their breath be sweet with honey, and their teeth
Whiten'd with milk, and their lips red with wine;
The vines they pluck of by the wells shall grow,

And spread their trails luxuriously for them:
And plenty they shall have as they fear God.
[*Exeunt.*

Scene X.—*A Vale in Goshen.*

Enter Judah *and* Joseph's Steward, *meeting.*

Steward

All hail to Joseph's brother!

Judah

His steward, I think?

Steward

Your countenance lives in my memory.—
An unfamiliar face is sometimes tied
About the neck of our remembrances
By something that affects our sympathies,—
Subtle in act, and entering the heart
By some peculiar passage that it holds.—
The sweetest evening, and the fairest star,
That ever I remember to have seen,
Pass'd in my early youth, with one that 's dead,
In thought, and vow, and fine reflection,
Of what in future was to be our lot,—
It lives within my mind, a fadeless dream,
Wherein I see once more the deep blue sky,
And taste the fragrance of the jasmine bower,
And feel the mellow beauty of the scene,
And overcount each precious thought and act
That the vast tomb hath swallow'd.—Even so,
Your face is graven on my memory
Because I saw your brother and yourself
Weep in each other's arms; a thousand since

Have pass'd me and re-pass'd me, yet no one
Do I remember.

JUDAH

Dust and travel, join'd
To the long sitting of our jaded mules,
Make any change a luxury: sit down
Beside me on this verdant shady bank,
And straight unfold into my eager ear
The bearing of the ruler and his health.

STEWARD

If that impatience be a malady
(Seeing that Time, like a vile subtle leech
Who plays the tyrant as his power decays,
Still with his medicine doth increase desire
As the relief draws near),—then is he ill.

JUDAH

You do bespeak him with a loving tongue.

STEWARD

Each man who serveth him excels his trust,
And strives for love and honour more than thrift:
All his high servants their own masters are,
For he requires each one should proudly keep
His independence, in his office done,
As for the people's good, and general weal,
Not as for him. Bondmen he has not one,
Nor slaves, but what are kept for humble tasks,
As hewing wood, and drawing at the well,
Which would disgrace the worst of all the rest.

JUDAH

He is a proper lord, and we shall soon
See him in Egypt.

STEWARD

Not so late as that,
For he is come to pitch his scarlet tent
In Goshen's vale; because, saith he (his tongue
Being rich with honey'd joy), in mellow tone,
'The bearded Israel, Patriarch of his tribe,
The son of Isaac, sire of Benjamin,
The rever'd father of my favour'd self,
Comes with his people, and his remnant years,
To fill the sight and touch of me his son;
And 'midst the comforts of the Egyptian land
(Far from the famine-eaten Canaan)
Thank God, and live.' Therewith he stoop'd and leap'd
Into his iron car; the charioteer,
Noting his haste, halloo'd the fretful steeds;
And he and all his host are coming down
Into this hollow vale. I had command
To outride the slow procession o'er the hills,
And greet the agèd Jacob in these words:
'Young Joseph, thy dear son, is coming on
To fill his father's arms. Praise be to God!'

JUDAH

I, as the herald of our father's tribe,
Was sent before to greet my brother's love,
And tell him of his joy and anxious eye
To see his new-found son.

STEWARD

We to our charges!—
I hear the cymbal singing in the wind,
And they approach amain. [*Exeunt severally.*

Scene XI.—*The Vale.*

Enter Jacob *and his* Tribe, Joseph, Brethren, Officers, Attendants, *&c.*

Jacob

Stand farther back—again, let me behold thee.—
Ah!—hast thou pass'd so many dismal years
Expos'd to Fate's compulsive action,
Naked to chance, unfriended, and forlorn,
And I was glad and happy!

Joseph

This is not well.—
I live, and am not dead; and God, you see,
Has honour'd me beyond my patience.

Jacob

True—true.—But I am sick with love: behold,
As a pomegranate, shaken by the wind,
Strewing its mellow fruit with autumn's hand;
So has my ripen'd joy been shower'd down;
And I am weak in body and in mind;
My joy did make me tremble, and I fear'd
It would uproot my manhood, spurs and all.

Joseph

Lean upon me.

Jacob

Yea, I am better now;
But your old hearts are ever ripe to death.
I have not wept my fill.

JOSEPH

Take courage, pray,
My father: lo! thy beard is soak'd with tears.

JACOB

Never more precious dew from heaven fell
Than those rare drops that mingle in my beard.—
Silence did strive to suffocate my heart,
But sobs still vented life. Such an embrace,
Great God, must touch Thy love!

JOSEPH

No more—be patient!

JACOB

Ah! Rachel's child! yet in thy manly face
I do behold thy lambency in youth;
And the proud coat of many colours, made
By these old doting hands, I still can see
O'erwav'd by thy young curls.

JOSEPH

Behold me chang'd.
Now I am lord of chariots, and of horse,
Of men-at-arms, and second to the king;
Full of command and power.

JACOB

Yea, it is much.—
Didst thou reward, in thy prosperity,
Those who were kind to thee when thou wert low?
Didst overpay their love? I hope thou didst,
For they did do my office—my good child!—

JOSEPH

Alas! alas! virtue that hath no power
To bring its own pretensions into light,
Feeds upon orts, and dies without a grave:
For all the world neglects it in its life,
And it ascends to God, embalm'd with tears.

JACOB

Come, let us change the talk—we must all bear;
I bore the loss of thee: yea, let it pass.—
There are now fled upon a nimble wing
A many years since I did hold thee thus:
Yet I do know thee well.—Joseph, art sure
This mighty king will not be wroth with thee,
That I have brought my tribe into the land?
And yet, why ask?—thou'rt wise—belov'd of all.
Come, let us go; and I will ride beside
Thee in thy car.—Speak!—Let me hear thy voice.

JOSEPH

So thou shalt, father.

JACOB

Joseph, art thou ill?
Thou lookest very pale.

JOSEPH

Behold me smile.

JACOB

Come,—that is well.—Benjamin, take my staff;
I'll lean upon thy brother:—'tis a bright day.
I said I would come down into the land,
See thee, and die.—I would fain live a little!—

[*Exeunt.*

THE END

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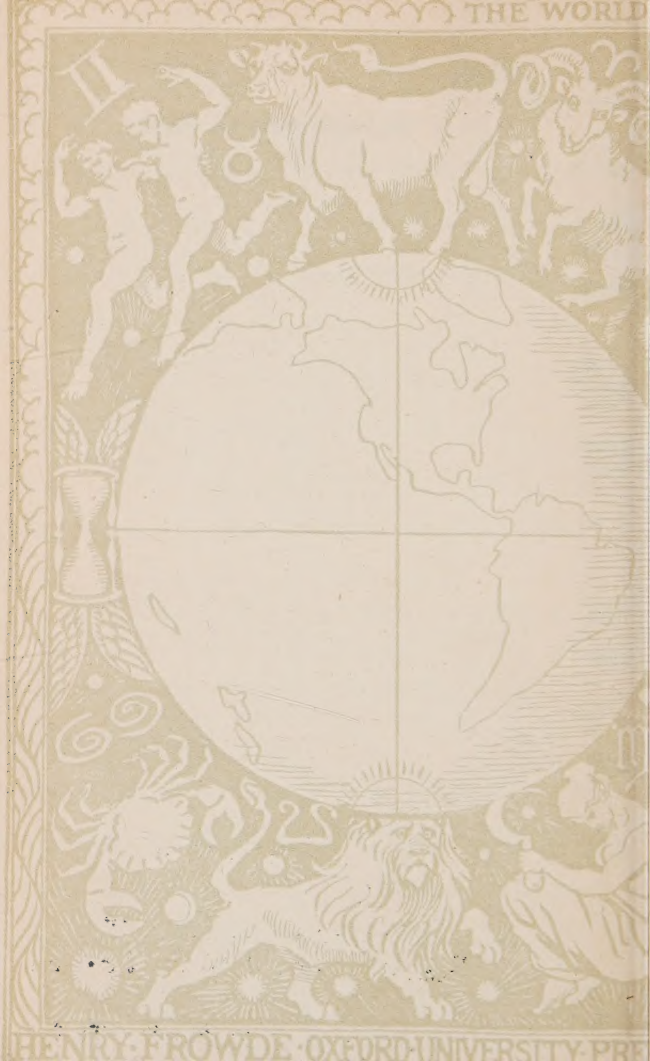
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